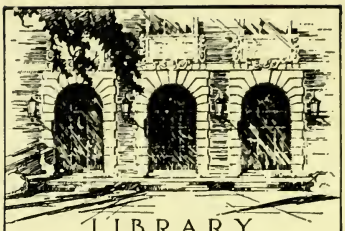

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JOHNNY ROBINSON.

VOL. II.

JOHNNY ROBINSON:

THE STORY OF

THE CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLDAYS OF AN

"INTELLIGENT ARTISAN."

BY

'THE JOURNEYMAN ENGINEER,'

AUTHOR OF "SOME HABITS AND CUSTOMS OF THE WORKING CLASSES."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1868.

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JOHNNY ROBINSON.

CHAPTER I.

HOLIDAY PROCEEDINGS — A FISHING EXPEDITION — BOW AND ARROW MAKING — TOM THE TINMAN — BIRD KILLING AND COOKING—BUTTON PIECES—RUSTING—A VISIT TO A PENNY GAFF.

N a week or two after this, the coming event of the usual half-yearly examination and holiday began to cast its shadow before. The teachers began to take extra pains with their classes, and occasionally the whole school was kept in till after the ordinary hour of dismissal. The probabilities as to who would take the prizes or be promoted to higher classes, were actively discussed, and those who were going in for prizes devoted all their energies to preparing them-

selves for the struggle; even their play-time being given to their lessons. I had not been long enough in the school to take any particular interest in this examination: and Butcher, Bryan, Turpin, and my other more intimate friends, were not a sufficiently reading set to have any chance for prizes, and valued the examination merely as the immediate forerunner of the break-up for the holidays. In due time the examination was held, the prizes distributed, and the speeches of Mr. Mayfield and the chairman for the occasion delivered, and then we were dismissed for three weeks, and rushed out of the school dancing and yelling with joy.

The next morning our set assembled in the Hollow, where we ran about like a lot of young colts, not playing at any particular game, but as it were luxuriating in the blessed fact of our being free—in our not having to go to school. The next day we again met in the Hollow, where we were joined by a boy from a neighbouring street, who had taken as a prize at the examina-

tion a copy of Hannah More's "Two Wealthy Farmers." He had the book with him, and after giving us a very enthusiastic account of its merits, proposed that he should read it to us. To this we agreed; and making ourselves seats of some bricks that were lying about, sat down to listen. For a quarter of an hour we were an attentive, if not a very appreciative audience; but at the end of that time Dick Turpin, who had been showing signs of impatience, burst out with "O, blow Mr. Worthy! it's all gammon; I don't believe a word of it. Let us go fishing, Billy."

"I'm agreeable," answered Butcher, "if Mickey and Johnny'll come."

"O, we'll come," we said; and the matter being thus settled, the reading was unceremoniously broken up, and we started on our fishing excursion.

"But what are you going to fish *with*, Butcher?" I asked.

"O, you'll see in a minute or two," was Billy's oracular answer.

And presently I did see; for when we were passing his house, Billy went in, and returned with an old can and a large handkerchief, which latter he and Mickey fastened to the end of a cane, so as to form a net. "There, *that's* what we're going to fish with, Johnny," he said, flourishing the net over his head. "That's yer sort; catch'em alive, O. And this," he continued, holding up the can, "is to keep 'em in when they're caught."

Armed with this tackle we arrived at a long, shallow pool, which was, it appeared, a favourite fishing-ground with the boys of our neighbourhood.

"Tuck up your trowsers, and pull off your boots," said Butcher to me, he and his companions beginning at the same time to do likewise. I obeyed, and he then handed the can to me, saying, "Put a drop of water in it, and follow us about, and take what we catch."

Everything being now ready, we waded in and commenced our netting for those shrimp-like

fishes that are generally seen in small shoals on the edges of pools and inland rivers, and which were known among the boys of Dockington as Jack Sharps. One of the rules of the gentle craft is to keep a strict silence, but by us this rule was much more honoured in the breach than the observance. We speedily got excited with our sport, and rushed about in all directions, continually giving vent to such exclamations as—"Ha! here they are, Billy!" "Come on quick; put the net in here!" "Have you got them?" "How many?" "That's yer sort!" By dinner time we had "can'd" about three score fish, and then we went home in high spirits with the sport we had had. After dinner we held a consultation as to what we should do with our fish: and after a number of other plans had been discussed, Butcher proposed that we should sell them for brass buttons, wherewith to play pitch and toss, that game being very popular just then. This was agreed to; and, headed by Billy bearing the can, we walked round the Hollow and up and down

the street, chaunting, "Who'll buy any Jack Sharps; a brass button for two?" In about a couple of hours we disposed of all our stock, and having "whacked" the buttons played pitch and toss till the evening, by which time Bryan and I had "skinned" our companions.

On the following day Butcher, who had carefully hoarded up the sixpence that my father had given him, announced his intention of going down to the docks to buy a prop of bamboo for making bows, and asked Bryan, Turpin, and me to accompany him. To this we eagerly assented; and having strictly enjoined our playmates to say that they did not know where we were if we should be inquired after, and each of us having, by the advice of Bryan, gone home and obtained a piece of bread to serve us by way of dinner, we set out. As we walked along we discussed various plans of making bows and arrows, and spoke of the execution that might be accomplished by these primitive weapons, the deeds of Robin Hood and other historical, and some I

fear imaginary, instances of modern feats of archery being cited. We unanimously agreed that the bow was the best and surest of all arms for bird-killing purposes, and it was resolved that when the bows were made, Butcher was to lend us one each, and we would go on bird-killing expeditions, and sell the birds, as we understood that sparrows would bring good prices, sparrow pies being, Butcher told us, regarded as great delicacies in aristocratic circles. And it was further agreed, at the suggestion of Mickey Bryan, that, if in the course of our shooting it became necessary for us to "trespass in pursuit of game," and we were chased, we would turn upon our pursuers and wound them in the legs, viewing it as an imperative act of self-defence.

When we got into the neighbourhood of the docks, Dick Turpin, who was of decidedly predatory proclivities, and who had acquired his *sobriquet* through having attempted to steal a horse that he had been employed to hold, with a view to setting up as a dashing highwayman,

became a very troublesome companion. The sight of a fruit or sweetmeat stall, whose proprietor was so placed against the wall as not to be able to get out very readily, inflamed him with a strong desire to make a raid upon it. He insisted upon stopping to "have a scrape" at every empty treacle or sugar hogshead that we passed, and while balancing himself on the rim of one of the latter to get at the inside, he tumbled head first into it, and had to be lifted out by some passing labourers, our efforts to extricate him having proved vain. He was chased for making a swoop upon some coffee beans that had run out of a sack at a grocer's door, and again for stealing peas, and he was taken redhanded in an attempt to purloin some sailors' biscuits from a cart, and was well shaken by the baker, and finally he had to fly and wait for us at a distance in consequence of having "snacked" a lot of brass buttons with which some boys were playing pitch and toss.

About the docks were a number of general

shops which, among other things, sold lengths of thick bamboo. Of these shops we made the round, and having at length chosen a prop suitable for bow making we purchased it, and taking it on our shoulders, started for home. The bamboo had cost sixpence, so that there was no money left to purchase wood for making arrows with, a state of things which, when we came to talk it over, Turpin suggested would be easily remedied by his stealing some staves that he had seen outside a cooper's shop. This proposition was, however, negatived, and it was agreed instead that on the following Saturday we should each devote the weekly penny allowed us by our fathers, to the purchase of wood for arrows, and tin for making the piles for them. During the next two or three days, saws, hatchets, and knives were smuggled out of doors, and the work of bow making fully occupied our time. When the bows were completed, wood was bought and a sheaf of arrows made, and then an extra subscription was made for the purpose of offering "Tom the Tinman"

twopence for the run of his cuttings in order to get pile pieces—the angular pieces, namely, cut from the square plates in forming round bottoms.

This Tom the Tinman was one of the notabilities of our neighbourhood. It was generally supposed—and his appearance went far to confirm the supposition—that he was a gipsy, and it was known that for many years he had followed the occupation of a travelling tinker in and around Dockington, his wife and two little boys going the same rounds as chair-menders. Having established a good connexion in the neighbourhood, he had taken a small house, and established himself as tinman and chair repairer. Tom, as well as being a tinker, was in a small way a member of the fancy. In his younger days he had been a principal with varying success in sundry "rough turns up" for small sums, later he had been in the habit of "setting to" at benefits, and acting as second at some of the minor prize fights in the Dockington district. And as he delighted to talk of things pugilistic, and was

always willing to give his opinion or any information he might possess respecting ring matters, he was in great request among the pothouse admirers of "the manly art." His taste and habits thus leaning to the pugilistic, and his pot and chair-mending business succeeding with him, he set up a boxing booth with which he attended fairs and merry-makings in Dockington and a circuit of twenty miles round. Among the "galaxy of talent" engaged by the tinman when out with his booth were his two sons, who were styled the little wonders, and were at the time we were about to visit him for the purchase of arrow heads, aged about fourteen and a half and sixteen years respectively.

To us boys Tom the Tinman was an object of the most ardent hero worship. We were fully convinced that he was one of the greatest characters of the age, and had no doubt that he was generally regarded with feelings of national pride. Stories of his prowess were current among us. We had

heard how when he was fighting Slogging Charley and was apparently hopelessly beaten, he replied to his second's offer to throw up the sponge, "O, no! a battle's never lost till it's won, and a man's never half licked while he can see and stand;" and then immediately went in and knocked his man out of time, thus verifying the truth of the proverbial philosophy involved in the first part of his reply. We had heard with admiration of the celerity with which he could "clear the kitchen" in a public house row, and of the manner in which he had polished off two gigantic drovers, who, not knowing the kind of person they had to deal with, had drank his beer, and refused to fill his pot again. And in our opinion the "Up, guards, and at 'em" attributed to Wellington was less epigrammatic and worthy of remembrance than Tom the Tinker's reply to a backer's advice to him to "go in" during his fight with the scientific Dan Knuckler.

"Go in at him!" said the backer.

"O, yes," answered Tom, "I can go in, and I

can hit him, and hit him d—d hard; but I can't get away again without catching something hot."

And so he continued "out fighting," and finally tired out the scientific Dan.

His sons, too, were regarded by us as veritable young paladins, prodigies of valour and science, who were ultimately destined to attain the proud position of pugilistic champions of England, and to have known whom, however slightly, would in after life be a circumstance to feel proud of. Billy Butcher was old enough to remember having been allowed to join in games in which the eldest of the young tinmen had taken part, but that was an honour now unattainable to us other youngsters, for the tinman's heir already affected the man, smoking short black pipes, "sporting" his own especial bull-dog, and lounging about clad in sportingly-cut clothes, and above all things eschewing the company of boys. His younger brother, however, still occasionally condescended to join in the games of some of the bigger boys, and to gladden the hearts of us smaller ones by

bestowing a nod or word of recognition upon us. Meeting this youth on the day upon which the twopence for the purchase of arrow-heads had been subscribed, Butcher asked him what sort of a stock of cuttings his father had got in then.

"Pretty tidy," answered the young tinman; "why?"

"O, because we want to buy some pile-pieces for our arrows," answered Butcher.

"Well, you'd better go on up now," briskly said the young boxer, who suddenly seemed to remember something, "and I daresay the old fellow 'll give you some for nothing, as he wants to see some of you lot about a cousin of mine that's come to live with us, going to your school."

"O, we'll go then," said Billy, beckoning to us to follow him. "You know we might get them for nothing," he added, when we were out of the young tinman's hearing; "old Tom's a good sort."

Although I had heard a great deal about Tom the Tinman, I had never hitherto seen him, and

naturally experienced a feeling of awe at the prospect of being introduced into so notable a presence. I was fain to believe Mickey Bryan's assurance that he was only just like another man, and wouldn't eat me any way; but still, when he opened the door in answer to Billy Butcher's knock, I shrank back so far that he had to ask the others if I was with them. On being told that I was, he cried out in a loud, cheery tone, "Come along in, young 'un, with the rest o' your mates;" and thus invited I entered the kitchen, which served him as a workshop, one side being devoted to the chair-mending business, which was presided over by his wife, and the other to the tinsmith work.

"Well, you can have all in the scrap-heap that 'll suit you, and there's more than two two-pen'orths, I'll warrant," he said, when Butcher had explained our proposal to buy the pick of the scrap-heap for twopence. "But we'll talk about that after a while," he went on; "I want to speak to you about another thing."

"You know," he continued, addressing Billy Butcher as gravely as though that youth had been his equal, "my old lass's sister was left a widow with a little lad to bring up, but she came of a family as is used to doing for themselves, and she managed to scratch for the both on 'em pretty comfortable. But you see there's none on us knows when we may go off, and about a month since she was taken ill and died in a week, and as the lad's a sickly little chap as ain't able to do owt in the way of work, we've took to him, and we want to see about sending him to school."

"You could send him to our school after the holidays," said Billy, who evidently thought that the tinman was attaching an undue importance to the matter.

"Well, that's what I wanted to ask you about," said the tinman: "they wouldn't be against him because he belonged to me, would they?"

"O, not a bit," said Billy, who would himself have regarded the relationship in the light of an

honour; "so that he pays his school wages regularly, and comes clean and tidy—that's all that they care about."

"Oh, well, my old girl'll see that's all right," said the tinman, in a relieved tone. "You see," he went on, "I never had any chance to go to school myself, and though my lads are clever enough with their fists, and know how to take care of themselves in most other ways, they never would go to school when *they* had the chance, and can't tell a big B from a barn door, as the sayin' is. This little chap, they tell me, however, is a regular clipping scholard; but then he ain't much else, for as I told you he's sickly, and wouldn't be able to take his own part if it come to fist work; and so if you chaps would let him go back'ards and for'ards with you, and keep your eyes on him till he got into the ways of the school, we'd all take it very kind of you, and we'd make it up to you somehow."

"Oh, we'll look after him," said Butcher, when he had exchanged glances of assent with Bryan

and Turpin. "We soon put you all right, didn't we, Johnny?"

"You did so," I answered, with fervour.

"And we're just the boys as can do it, too," put in Bryan by way of a clencher.

"Oh, you know your way about, I'll be bound," said the tinman, smiling; "and I'm glad I spoke to you; and now you can look among the scraps for what'll suit you; and while you're doing it, I'll make you a few proper piles."

So saying he set to work, and by the time we had turned over his heap he had made us a dozen fine heads, on the symmetry and sharpness of which Butcher became quite rhapsodical.

When the twopence was offered him, the tinman refused to accept it, telling us to spend it for something else, and that some of these next days he would send his nephew round to the Hollow to see us. Having thanked him for his liberality, and once more assured him that the boy would be all right, we returned home rejoicing, and unanimously pronouncing the tin-

man to be "a regular stunner, and no mistake about it."

The next day we were fully occupied in heading our arrows, and the following one was devoted to target practice, in which in the course of the day we obtained such a degree of proficiency as, in our own opinion, justified us in fixing our first bird-slaughtering expedition for the next morning. We were going in for battue-shooting, and so in order to draw our birds together, took a bag of bread crumbs with us, in addition to our bows and arrows. After a walk of a couple of miles, we came to a lane which, though having sand-pits on one side of it and brick-fields on the other, and being generally of a dingy and smoke-dried rather than a green and fresh appearance, appeared to us town-bred boys the very beau ideal of a country lane, and in it we made our first pitch. A council was called, in the first place, to decide upon some systematic plan of action. Mickey Bryan and Turpin were for killing on the wing, and all

hands blazing at one bird, believing that some of us would be sure to hit it. Billy Butcher, however, was for a more comprehensive plan. He had, he informed us, read that the best mode of shooting small birds was to get a lot of them in a line by means of bait, and then let fly at them, as you then stood a chance of knocking over several with one shot. This scheme seemed so obviously good in theory, that we at once determined to act upon it. Two lines of crumbs were accordingly laid, Bryan and I being appointed to cover one while our companions took charge of the other. Birds soon began to alight one by one, and Mickey was very impatient to take a shot; but by the command of Butcher, who was tacitly recognised as the leader of the expedition, we reserved our fire till there was a good cluster of sparrows at each line of crumbs. Then, on a motion from Billy, we let fly all together, and the whiz of our arrows was instantly followed by the buzz of the birds as they took flight. We eagerly rushed up, hoping to find

a goodly number of birds spitted, and never doubting but that there would be at least one dead bird to each arrow; but on getting up to where the covey had been, no trace of a bird was there to be seen, and we regarded each other with blank and chopfallen looks.

"It's queer, ain't it?" said Butcher, who, though the most deeply chagrined, was the first to recover his self-possession.

"Well, I thought we should 'a killed one or two, anyway," said Bryan; "I think we'd better have a try at them as they're coming down, as I wanted at first."

"Very well," said Butcher, "we'll try that way next; you give us the nod when to fire."

We accordingly retired to our stations again, and, two birds presently flying towards the crumbs, Mickey gave the signal and we fired, but the birds flew away unharmed, and one of the arrows that had gone over the hedge was lost. In consequence of this latter circumstance we resolved to return to our first plan, and on firing at the next

covey we killed a couple of birds. This put us in the highest possible spirits, and having celebrated our success by the performance of a triumphal break-down with whooping chorus, we began to consider what we should do with the game bag, which, now that we had made a start, we felt sure of making, and even fixed the price per dozen at which we would sell the birds. But in counting our sparrows, if not before they were hatched, at any rate before they were killed, we, as often happens in sanguine expectations of this kind, were grievously mistaken. We killed nothing in our next two volleys, and after that the birds began to get shy, and it was nearly three hours from the time we had our first kill till we knocked over our next bird; and the birds beginning to get still scarcer after our second kill, we determined to shift our ground. About a mile further on we came to a large field, into which we got after having been reminded by Turpin that we had agreed to shoot our pursuers, should we be chased. Here we only put one line

of crumbs, and so arranged ourselves as to expose the birds to a cross fire, but though they came more frequently and in greater numbers than they had done in the lane, we had only killed two more by dusk, so that our total bag was only five head.

The bows generally used by the boys in our neighbourhood were made of pieces of old cask hoops, and were altogether inferior to our bamboo ones, and we had in consequence been talking very largely of what we would do, so that to the practical evil of bad sport was added the prospect of being chaffed and derided by our play-fellows, whose admiration and envy would, we felt convinced, be turned to contempt on witnessing our ignominious failure; for such, as compared with our anticipatory boasting, our return with only five head of game would undoubtedly be. This point we anxiously discussed as we trudged home tired, hungry, and disappointed. Turpin suggested that we should say we had sold two dozen sparrows. If we all stuck to it they couldn't get

over *that*, he said. This plan was, however, after a little consideration, rejected, principally on the grounds put forward by Mickey Bryan, that we might be asked to show the money, and that in any case the truth would be sure to come out sooner or later, and we would be chaffed all the more. It being decided that this was a case in which honesty was the best policy, we finally resolved to act upon Butcher's advice, to take it all in good part, you know, as long as it's anything like, but to warm any of 'em that got coming it too strong.

On getting into our neighbourhood we hastened to our respective homes, having agreed to meet in the Hollow on the following morning to divide the birds, which were meanwhile left in Butcher's charge. It had been part of our original plan to have sold a dozen or two of the birds that we had undoubtingly calculated upon killing, and with the money thus obtained to have purchased flour and other materials for making pie-crust, and with these and the birds

kept for our own use, one of Mickey Bryan's sisters, whom we were in the habit of taking into our confidence in such of our plans as required female aid, was to have made us a large sparrow pie. This part of our scheme had now of course to be abandoned, and the question arose, having caught our birds, how were we to cook them? The prospect of getting a taste of the sparrows kept the chaffing propensities of our companions in check, and a number of them who had promised to contribute a jacket-pocketful of coal each towards the fire which would be necessary for carrying out whatever mode of cooking was decided upon, were called into our council. Roasting was the first plan decided upon, and Butcher and Bryan proceeded to pluck and truss the birds, while the rest of us collected sticks and coal and made the fire. A cat's gallows was then erected across the fire, and the birds suspended from it by pieces of wire, a pennyworth of lard being subscribed for to baste them with. In this way, however, they got so

horribly smoked and blackened that we were obliged to take them down and consider upon some other mode of cooking. Turpin volunteered to "sneak" a saucepan out of their house, but this offer was not accepted, as several of the more knowing boys said that all the good of the birds would be lost in boiling, and several other plans having been objected to for various reasons, it was finally resolved to encase the birds in balls of clay, and place them in the embers until they were cooked, some of the boys having read that that was a favourite mode of cooking among hunters. This plan was acted upon, and though during the progress of the operation some of us burnt our fingers rather severely, we brought it to a successful termination.

When the balls were burnt hard they were raked from the fire, broken, and the birds taken out; and having got a supply of pepper and salt and some bread and butter to eat with them, we sat round the fire and made a lunch of the sparrows thus cooked. As we ate them we held forth

enthusiastically in their praise, smacking our lips, and assuring each other that we had never tasted anything half so nice before, while Billy Butcher opined that gentlefolks might well esteem sparrow-pies a luxury. This delight was, I fancy, however, in most cases, as in my own, affected. It was with much difficulty that I got down my portion of the delicacy that I bepraised, and with it I swallowed such a quantity of clay as only a young and strong digestion, used to disposing of the "large ha'porths" of the kind of eatables sold in those quantities in the streets of large towns, could have stood, and for hours after lunch several of the sparrow-eating circle were confessedly qualmish. In short, the bird-shooting business so extensively prepared for and rejoicingly looked forward to, was at every point a practical failure, and all concerning it was quietly allowed to drop. For two or three days we took our bows and arrows out with us, and engaged in target practice, and extemporized games of Robin Hood and Little John, the Hollow serving as our Sherwood

Forest, in an invasion of which, in the character of a sheriff's officer, Turpin was severely wounded, Bryan, who was enacting the part of Little John, sending an arrow right into the calf of his leg. When these sports began to pall, Butcher tried to let out his bows at a farthing a day, and failing in this, ultimately sold them at an alarming sacrifice.

The sport on which we had chiefly depended for amusement during the holidays having thus fallen through, we were compelled to seek other pursuits with which to fill up our time. One day we made an excursion to the beach beyond the docks, returning Dick Turpin minus his shoes and stockings, which some person or persons unknown had carried off while he was wading in the surf; and all of us with our clothes wet and draggled, circumstances for which the lot of shells, a number of crabs—one of which had bitten the unfortunate Turpin's finger till it bled—and other common objects of the sea-shore with which we were ladened, in no way propitiated our

parents, who in every case sent us supperless to bed, and in Turpin's added a good hiding to the other evils that had fallen upon him in the course of that day.

A day or two after this, my three companions and I went to see some of our school-mates who lived in another part of the town. When we got into the street in which they lived we saw them seated on the door-steps of an empty house, and busily engaged rubbing something on the steps.

"Hullo, what move is this?" said Butcher, when we got up to them.

"Oh, making button pieces," answered one of them without pausing in his employment.

"How button pieces?" said Billy, to whom the whole affair was a mystery.

"Why, these," said the other boy, holding up a piece of packthread on which were strung four or five dozen cherry-stones rubbed flat, and with small holes through their centres. "You see," the speaker continued, taking one of the stones off the string, "they cover them with cloth and

make buttons of 'em. You can sell 'em a farthing a dozen, and you can easily do eight dozen a day if you have a proper rubber like this," and he held up a piece of board in which were half a dozen small shallow holes, into which the cherry-stones were so inserted as to leave half their thickness exposed as a rubbing surface.

"Well, that *is* a good move," said Billy, in a tone of admiration, "but where do you get the stones from?"

"Oh, about the streets and markets," was the answer. "Cherries are in now, you know, and you can pick up any quantity of stones."

"My eye, lads!" exclaimed Billy turning to us, "twopence a day! we'll take to that game."

"You should," said the other boy, who had by this time resumed his rubbing; "but fair play, don't come looking for stones on our ground, you know; our round is from Church Street down to the beginning of Dockington Road, and through the old market."

Billy hastened to assure them that we would

act in a strictly honourable manner, and regard their hunting ground as sacred, and as they did not care about ceasing their manufacture of button pieces to join us in any game, we returned home to dinner.

On meeting again after dinner, our talk was all of the El Dorado-like prospect opened up to us by the discovery we had made respecting button pieces, and we speedily agreed to set about making them immediately, and to "go partners" in the work. Accordingly, headed by Butcher, we set out to hunt for cherry-stones, and by tea time had gathered Billy's marble bag full of them. After tea we made our rubbers, and next morning commenced to work on the steps of a large corner shop, which happened to be empty just then.

While we were scouring away as hard as we could, about eleven o'clock in the day, we noticed a little, meagre-looking, mealy-faced boy walk by several times, glancing timidly at us as he passed. At last he came to a stand beside us,

and then Butcher looked up, and in a rather threatening tone, asked, "Well, what do *you* want?"

"If you please," he answered, "my name's Frank Meadows, and I'm the boy that Tom the tinman spoke to you about."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Billy. "Well, you should 'a said so at first, cos you see I didn't know who you was, and I thought perhaps you might be coming to try to snack our cherry-stones, and that's why I spoke sharp like. But never mind, Frank, it's all right now, isn't it?" continued Billy, seeing that the boy remained bashfully silent.

"Oh yes," answered Frank. "Uncle thought I'd better come round to see you, so as you'd know me."

"Yes, he told us he'd send you round," said Billy; "you can tell him it'll be all right, we'll look after you, and if any one gets putting on you, *we'll* let 'em know how many beans makes five, wont we, lads?"

We replied collectively that we just would.

"Shall I help?" asked Frank, as we resumed our employment, which had been suspended while this talk had been going on.

"Well, yes, if you like," said Billy; "we haven't got a spare rubber, but here's the pricker, and you can be putting the holes through those that are rubbed down."

"How old are you, Frank?" suddenly asked Butcher of our new companion, when he had been at work among us for a quarter of an hour.

"Nine," answered Frank.

"No, but are you, though!" exclaimed Billy in astonishment; "well, you are a little 'un. Why, I'm only just turned ten, and I'm twice as big as you almost."

And very little and childlike for his age Frank indeed appeared, but his face, though small and pallid, had a pleasant and intelligent look, and he soon proved himself a desirable companion and an acquisition to our circle. When his bashfulness had worn off, he began to tell us

stories of "the wild and wonderful." Some relating to travels and adventures by sea and land, others to the deeds of famous pirates and robbers, and others again to giants, genie, dogs that talked like Christians, and would, at the command of the magicians their masters, enter any place, wrap their tails round barrels of wine, and run off with them; and a variety of other imaginary beings, compared with whom the "Anthropophagi, and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders," would have been commonplace personages.

"My eye, you are a stunner to tell tales," said Turpin, in a tone of the utmost admiration, as Frank was about to leave us at dinner-time.

"Well, I like to tell 'em," said Frank, whose pale face was flushed with pleasure at seeing the favourable impression he had made upon us. "I read a great many, and some I think of myself; they come into my head when I'm in bed with my eyes shut, but not asleep; it used to frighten me at first, but doesn't now."

"Well, that's queer, now, isn't it?" said Mickey Bryan, when Frank had gone.

"Well, I don't know," said Butcher, speaking in a slow meditative way, "when you come to think of it, you see, there are chaps of that sort. Why, you see," he went on after a short pause, during which the illustration seemed to have occurred to him, "plays and the tales in books are made out of fellows' heads, and of course it must come into their heads first; and it's very likely when they're in bed that they think of it, and that's how it is with Frank."

"Well, I only wish I could tell tales as well as him," said Mickey, who, notwithstanding Butcher's philosophical explanation, was still disposed to regard Frank's powers of imagination as something queer; "but at any rate," he concluded, "he's a nice little chap." And in this estimate of the Tinman's nephew, whom we already began to speak of as one of our circle, we all agreed.

In the course of three days we had converted nearly a thousand cherry stones into button pieces,

and we then began to think about selling them. We had forgotten to ask the friends who first told us of this mode of making money where we could sell our stock, and Turpin was sent to get this now necessary information. At the end of a couple of hours he returned from his mission, with the very unsatisfactory intelligence that the chief of the other party of button-piece makers had informed him that they had understood that the marine-store dealers bought them, but that those to whom they had offered their stock had declined to purchase them; he however suggested that perhaps the dealers in our neighbourhood might be disposed to trade. After what we had heard, we had but faint hopes that such would be the case, but still we determined to try, and vainly spent a day in going the round of the rag shops. The ragmen all declined to deal, and at last one of them confirmed the suspicion which we were already beginning to entertain, to the effect that we were on a wild-goose chase, by telling us that what we had got were not button pieces, as those

articles were not made out of cherry stones, but stamped out of bone.

We were terribly chopfallen at the downfall of our hopes in this respect, as, fully calculating upon the money, we had arranged to wind up our holiday proceedings by a surreptitious visit to the three-penny gallery of the theatre, that served as the local home of the blood-and-thunder drama, and at which the delectable melodrama of "Sixteen String Jack; or, The Road and its Riders," was then running.

"Well, it's all up with going to the theatre now," said Billy Butcher, with a mournful shake of the head, and then in a fierce tone he added, "I'm blow'd, if I thought them other chaps had been gammoning us, it would be me and the best of them for it."

"O, it's no good of you talking that way," said Turpin, "they were let in as well as we were; the best thing we can do now is to try and swop them for other things with lads as arn't up to their being of no use."

This suggestion having been rejected by the rest of us, as being "reg'lar shabby," Butcher, in a more cheerful tone, observed, "I'll tell you what we might do, though; we might go rusting, and get enough money to go to the penny gaff with, for I should like to see some performance before we go back to school, and it's no good asking our fathers to take us anywhere till Christmas-time."

"But what is rusting, Billy?" I asked, when he had ceased speaking.

"Why, looking for old iron, or brass, or anything else of that kind, and selling them; Mickey and me made fourpence apiece that way last holidays."

The rusting project having been demonstrated by this previous experience to be a practical one, was agreed to. The next day we each searched our homes for the purpose of routing out any rust that might be in them, and in this first step we were very successful. Butcher found a broken poker and an old door-bolt. Bryan discovered an old set of brass castors, and a bundle

of rusty door keys. Turpin contributed one of his old hoops, a piece of chain, and a door-scraper, —which we subsequently discovered he had purloined from an empty house ;—while I was able to add an old brass door-handle, and a broken hand hammer to the general stock; and Frank Meadows, on learning what we were about, gave us a number of broken saucepan-handles, though he declined to join us in our proposed visit to the gaff. Having deposited these things in a place of safety, we set out on a general voyage of discovery for unconsidered trifles in the way of rust. Our search was principally among rubbish-heaps and around boiler yards and foundries, and in the course of the day we collected a considerable addition to our stock, which, when the produce of two more days' rusting had been added to it, and a proposal of Turpin's to add to its value by running lead into some old thimbles and the hollow of the brass door-handles had been negatived, we sold to a marine-store dealer for tenpence.

Having realized so much, Butcher at first pro-

posed that we should add twopence to it out of our weekly pennies, and carry out our first intention of going to the theatre. But as the theatre scheme had been founded upon the supposition that our button pieces would have brought us one-and-ninepence, Billy's proposition was rejected; and it was finally agreed that we should go in for a combination of pleasures by going to the gaff, and spending the surplus over the price of admission in a "blow out" of cakes and nuts. The eatables sold inside the gaff being immensely dear, we purchased our stock out of doors, and with our pockets well stuffed we betook ourselves to our penny temple of the drama.

The gaff, which had originally been a coalshed, was in a leading thoroughfare, and though inside it was ill-furnished, dirty, dismal, and unwholesome, it was, viewed from the outside, one of the most conspicuous establishments in the street, by reason of its front being abundantly adorned with the veneer, gilt, and plate glass which characterize the gin-palace style of architecture. On

either side of the entrance were boards, on which were rudely painted a list of the evening's entertainments, which, on the occasion of our visit, were to consist of "Magic and Mystery, and scenes with the Laughing Gas by the Female Wizard of the World. To be followed by the thrilling drama, in three acts, entitled 'Red Hand the Robber; or, The Murderers of the Heath.' The whole to conclude with a Laughable Farce." This programme was to be gone through twice in the course of the evening, the first performance, which was of course the one we were going to attend, lasting from half-past six till half-past eight.

We arrived at the gaff a few minutes after six, and found a group of children and other idlers already assembled round its doors, listening to the strains of the organ-grinder who constituted the orchestra of the establishment. Having read the bill, we went in without further delay in order to obtain good seats. Passing through the green baize curtains at the end of the entrance

lobby, we were received by the proprietress of the gaff, a tall, stout, masculine looking woman, who, in addition to her being money-taker, sustained the *rôle* of The Female Wizard of the World; and during the progress of those parts of the performance in which she was not engaged, carried round the nuts, biscuits, gingerbeer, and other refreshments sold on the premises. She also acted as constable to the establishment, by quelling rows, and ejecting any persistingly disorderly member of the audience.

The inside of the gaff contrasted unfavourably with its gaudy exterior. It was dark and ill-ventilated, and the fact that smoking was *not* prohibited in it, and that the great majority of its male *habitués* smoked throughout the performance, was the cause of a sickening smell of stale tobacco being added to the general stifling closeness of its atmosphere, the noisomeness of which was further increased by the stench from the naphtha lamps by which the building was lighted, and that arising from the garments of

individuals who followed unsavoury occupations, and came to the gaff in their working clothes. The seats, of which there were about twenty rows rising one above the other, consisted of pieces of narrow planking loosely laid across a frame. The first three rows were fully occupied when we entered, and so we took our place on the fourth. From this point we had a good view of the stage, which was very small and ricketty, and was furnished with but two scenes, one of which served for all out-, and the other for all in-door scenery. At the foot of the stage, in the space usually occupied by the orchestra, was a stand with gingerbeer, biscuits, &c., and in the small recess between the end of this stand and the wall, was placed the organ-grinder, who at half-past six was brought from the door by the proprietress, who at the same time called upon those outside to be in time, as the performance was just about to commence. This last announcement brought in a considerable number who had been waiting outside till the last; and when, with commendable

punctuality, the curtain rose, discovering the Female Wizard of the World in "The Home of Magic," the house was pretty well filled. The audience was just such an one as is still usually found in penny gaffs, where such pernicious jail-bird breeding institutions are still permitted to exist. It consisted of one or two dissipated old men and women, and a lot of young fellows of eighteen or twenty—mostly of the costermonger and street-hawker persuasions—with their girls, a number of boys of the street-arab class, ranging from six to fifteen years of age, and some school-boys who, like ourselves, were present without the knowledge or consent of their parents. Some of the young fellows sat with their arms around their girls' waists, or otherwise made love to them without the slightest affectation of secrecy, and many of the little Arabs, for whose clothing no ragman would literally have given twopence, spent from threepence to sixpence each for refreshments in the course of the performance. Most of the male portion of the audience, both old and young,

had pipes in their mouths, and many of them, both male and female, seemed to be on intimate terms with the actors, whom they familiarly addressed and applauded by name, and who, when not engaged, mixed freely with those in front of the house. In the intervals of the performance the audience employed themselves in free fighting, cursing, shouting, eating, and drinking.

The magical portion of the entertainment consisted of a few of the simpler mechanical tricks of the conjuring art, and the "scenes with the laughing gas" in setting boys to cuff each other. The melodrama was of course of the unintelligible and spasmodically ranting type peculiar to gaffs and country fairs. "The whole strength of the company," consisting of two men and two women, were engaged in the piece, the men playing Red Hand the Robber, and Earl Osmond, the leader of the Murderers of the Heath; and the women, a farmer's wife and her daugher, the Rose of the Village; both mother and daughter being dressed in pink tights and muslin skirts throughout the

piece, the scenes of which were laid alternately on the lonely heath and in Farmer Goodman's cottage. Red Hand the Robber was an outlaw of the virtuous kind, who, as he stated, only robbed the rich to serve the poor. He was constantly turning up at all sorts of unexpected times and places, in order to defeat the bloodthirsty machinations of the Murderers of the Heath, whose leader he at last fatally wounds in a "terrific combat," and that worthy confessing while dying that Red Hand, and not he, is the true Earl Osmond, the latter gets the earldom and estates, and marries the lovely Rose of the Village. The so-called Farce which concluded the entertainments of the evening was simply a farrago of senseless gag, idiotic buffoonery, and indecent pantomime.

Such, as seen by the light of the sense and experience of after years, were really the entertainments which I and my schoolmates witnessed at the Dockington gaff. At the time we saw them, however, they seemed to us truly delightful per-

formances. The meaningless grimaces of the actors in the farce were to us really laughable; the feats of the Female Wizard of the World were, in our eyes, the *acme* of magical skill; while the drama of Red Hand and the manner in which it was performed seemed to us simply sublime.

This visit to the penny gaff took place on the Thursday before the Monday on which we were to return to school, and one result of it was, that the impressionable Turpin was stage-struck, and during the brief remainder of our holiday, and for some weeks after, was constantly rushing upon me, seizing me forcibly by the neck, and prodding me in the ribs with a formidable wooden dagger, at the same time exclaiming in a sepulchral now-for-the-bloody-deed tone—"Ha! ha! Earl Osmond, thine enemy Red Hand the Robber sends thee to hell!"

CHAPTER II.

DIFFERENT VIEWS UPON HOLIDAYS—FRANK MEADOWS COMES TO THE SCHOOL—"MY SWEETHEART WHEN A BOY"—I FIGHT WITH A FRIEND, AND BILLY BUTCHER FIGHTS FOR A FRIEND.

IN such proceedings as these our holidays —which to us seemed to pass away all too swiftly—were spent. Our parents entertained what we considered the unjust, if not absolutely insane idea, that even in holiday time all play and no work was not likely to make good boys of us. Acting upon this idea, they frequently attempted to make us do work in the way of running errands, or minding the house or our younger brothers and sisters when our mothers were out, or even in some extreme cases at lessons. These reprehensible attempts we of course

did our best to defeat. If we were sent on errands we considered it a matter of principle to loiter over them, and in those cases in which we thought we could do so without danger to our skin, to bungle them. If when we had once got out to play any of our mothers were seen looking for us, some friendly companion would give us timely notice, and the particular party "wanted" would decamp until the danger was past. Were any of our younger brothers or sisters sent to look for us, they were ordered to go back and say they could not find us, and threatened with the direst vengeance should they betray us. The shout in a female voice of "Our Mickey," or "Johnny Robinson," was regarded by the parties called upon as a signal for getting under hiding; and if one of us met the mother of any of our companions inquiring for them, we regarded it as a duty to send them in the opposite direction to that in which their sons were to be found. And on one occasion, when my father had set me a lesson in the evening, and given me to under-

stand that I would "get something for myself" if it was not prepared by dinner-time on the following day, I got out of the obnoxious task by acting upon Butcher's advice to keep out of the way until my father had gone to work again after dinner.

By persevering in these tactics, we generally managed to get the best of our parents in these contests, and for this and other reasons, they were as glad as we were sorry to see our holidays come to a termination. Our holiday amusements were generally of a kind that led to much dirtying and tearing of clothes, and consequently to considerable additional washing and mending for our mothers; and sometimes they were of a nature that resulted in the breaking of dinner knives, or the "sneaking" out of the house of some other useful household article. The neighbours generally, too, as well as our parents, rejoiced at the termination of our holiday, for in holiday times our mere presence became a sort of general nuisance in the district. My three friends and I were only

a fraction of the boys in our neighbourhood who went to the Borough and other similar schools, and when during the holidays a lot of these boys assembled in the streets, the shouting and yelling with which they accompanied their play was the reverse of pleasant to quiet householders. In the holidays, too, fights between the boys, leading to bickering and quarrelling among their parents, were also frequent, as were likewise broken windows, about which none of the boys—on their own showing—ever knew anything. And in addition to such general matters as these, there were one or two people in our neighbourhood who had more special and grievous reason than even our parents for wishing the particular holidays, of which I gave some description in the last chapter, at an end. When no other sport was on hand, Butcher and Bryan would go to the house of the old woman who had assaulted me in the long-tailed pony game, and bawl "Old Mother Knocksoftly," and other nicknames and vituperative phrases, through the keyhole, or give a thundering peal upon the

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knocker, and then decamp; and Turpin, who was under the impression that she was a devout Roman Catholic, was in the habit of writing "To Hell with the Pope" upon her door whenever he was out after dusk.

A country woman, who lived in a corner house near which the boys were in the habit of meeting, also came in for special annoyance at our hands. She was a somewhat eccentric person; her most prominent, and in adult circles talked about weakness, being an excessive admiration for, and habit of constantly dragging into every conversation, "John," her stalwart husband. "John says so," was a statement which, in her opinion, decisively and for ever settled any debateable point, and to "tell John" she considered the direst possible threat. Accordingly, when the boys congregated under her window, she came out, and finding that we took no notice of her indignant intimation, that we "mustn't play anunst her door," added, "or I'll tell John of you." Now we boys had not heard about John, and consequently disregarded

this, in her estimation, terrible threat. But the unvaried reiteration of, "You munna play anunst my door, or I'll tell John of you," with which she greeted our appearance near her house, at last struck the fancy of the boys, and from that hour her fate was sealed.

Every day, and sometimes many times a day, some of the gang who had nothing else to engage their attention, would assemble round her door and shout her favourite phrase *to* each other, and *at* her when she came out to them. And when her husband, who had in other ways been put to the blush by her indiscreet boasting about him, was passing to and fro to his meals, they made a point of hollaing after him "I'll tell John of you." And though, upon being made aware of the delinquencies of their sons in this respect, the parents of some of the boys promised to "warm them," we were fully aware that some of the neighbours who, but for conventional restraints, would themselves have been inclined to resent the too frequent and obtrusive praise of John, rather

admired our proceedings. Others in the district were also annoyed by us in a more or less special degree, and in ways in which we had anything but the sympathy of the neighbours of the victims. In short we were, as a lot of schoolboys in a densely and promiscuously populated manufacturing district usually are, a general annoyance to our elders, and it was therefore, as I have said, with feelings of joy that our mothers and their female neighbours welcomed the day on which we were to go to school again. Our own feelings were, it scarcely need be said, of an opposite character. *We* lamented over the swiftness with which the three weeks had passed away, and hoped that some fortunate accident might occur to give us another week or two's grace, as Butcher had informed me happened once before, when the repairs which the school usually underwent at this season had not been completed in time. But no such good fortune awaited us upon this occasion, the school was open to receive us, and our parents were only too anxious to send us.

Butcher, Bryan, and I had arranged to meet

Turpin at the top of his street, which was nearer to the school than the one in which we lived, and there we were also joined by Frank Meadows and his aunt, who was in a nervous flutter respecting her part of the business in hand. She had never in her life been within the walls of a school, and had never, to her knowledge, seen a live schoolmaster; and as she entertained the most exalted ideas concerning schools and "scholards," and all relating thereto, she openly expressed her fears that she would not be able to get through with the job. But we all hastened to assure her that she need have no fear, that Mr. Mayfield was the pleasantest of men, and would be as civil to a poor woman as to a rich one, and that all she would have to do would be to tell Frank's name and age. These assurances put her in a more calm and courageous frame of mind, and she nobly evinced her gratitude for the consolation we had given her by buying twopen'orth of sweets and dividing them amongst us.

The first morning after the half-yearly holidays was tacitly understood to be a morning of grace—a time in which the usual discipline was relaxed in order to allow all hands, masters, teachers, and pupils to pull themselves together for the ensuing six months' work. The punishment of the batch of late-comers, who got in immediately after prayers, was by law of custom remitted on this morning; and even those who did not come in till after dinner were not asked for notes of excuse, unless there was special reason to suppose that they had been playing truant. Revised rolls, indicating what boys had been promoted to higher classes, were called over, and those going into fresh classes took their places at the bottom of them, and below them again were placed the boys joining the school that morning. On the other hand, many of the old scholars who were about the age for leaving school, or who being of an enterprising turn of mind had got places for themselves, did not return to the school; so that, for the time being,

most of the classes were in so crude a state as to put any steady work out of the question, and in a lesser degree this was the case throughout the week.

Bryan and I were among those who were advanced from the fifth to the fourth class, of which latter Butcher and Turpin were already members, and to this class Frank Meadows was also assigned, so that we were now all together—a circumstance over which we exchanged many congratulatory glances. For the first two or three days there was very little in the way of sport going on in the playground, the time being chiefly occupied in the mutual narration of their various adventures and misadventures during the holidays between boys who, though friends in school, were in a great measure separated when out of it by reason of living at a distance from each other. During these days Frank Meadows was constantly with us, and several attempts that were made to roast him were put down either by threats or the whispered "Oh,

drop it, lads, he's only a weak little fellow, you see," with which Butcher appealed to the better nature of the boys; and subsequently his best protection lay in his being an universal favourite on account of his skill as a story-teller and generally obliging manner.

I was now recognised as one of the fully initiated, and a member of a very good set in the school, and for the next two years my life flowed on in the ordinary current of the school-life of a boy of the working classes. I took down, and was taken down by my classmates when at lessons, and, upon the whole, made some progress in my education. I joined in all the games of the play-ground, and extended my friendships, and, like most other boys, had my quarrels and fights, both in school and out, and sometimes I fell into the clutches of Ashplant at school, and "got the strap" at home. This latter event usually occurred when I had been making a raid upon the cupboard, or when I refused to swallow the medicine which the over-

eating consequent upon these raids, or an extra indulgence in the eatables of the street stalls, made it necessary for me to take.

Medicine was one of the most painful crosses of this period of my life, and I did not always bear it meekly. In my early infant days I had considerable experience of it, and as I have a constitutional objection to everything in the shape of drugs, I need scarcely say that that experience was of a painful character. I have been credibly informed that during the progress of my "teething," and some other of the complaints peculiarly incidental to infantile humanity from which I suffered, I was, much against the little amount of will at that time developed in me, heavily drenched with medicine; and I still have a dim, dreamy, shuddering recollection of that time when, being too young to be reasoned with, or to understand that medicine was "for my good," or that I "must take it," it was administered to me by the simple process of holding my nose until I opened my mouth, and then dexterously

shooting it down my throat. A little later medicine was one of the terrors by which I was kept in order, and in my schoolboy days it was simply the bane of my existence. Even when at home for the holidays, the demon of physic continued to pursue me. Like many other boys, I almost invariably over-ate myself at those times, and had to do penance for that indiscretion by taking medicine. Of course at such times I shirked my physic whenever it was possible to do so, and on one memorable (to me) occasion I was detected in an almost literal attempt to "throw physic to the dogs." It was during the Christmas holidays, and there being an abundance of Christmas cheer in our house, I had as usual over-ate myself, and the doctor had to be called in. Whether it was that the draught prescribed on this occasion was more than usually nauseous, or that my fixed aversion to medicine was for the moment unusually strong I know not; but for some cause I felt an extraordinary and unconquerable reluctance to take this particular dose,

and resolved, if possible, to dispose of it in some more pleasant (to me) manner than swallowing it. My first idea was of open rebellion, though, upon reflection, I abandoned that plan and determined to resort to artifice; but after in vain trying a number of stratagems to avoid the medicinal ordeal I began to give myself up for lost. The medicine was to be taken under the personal superintendence of my mother, but each time that she commended the medicinal chalice to my lips I turned from it with a shudder of abhorrence, and to her earnest entreaties to me to "be a man," and "drink it off at once," "just gulp it down," and so forth, I could only reply by a faintly uttered "I can't." When this had gone on for about a quarter of an hour without a spoonful of the draught being taken, I requested my mother to leave me by myself, as I thought I could take it better if no one was looking at me. To this proposition she after a little consideration agreed, saying that she would give me five minutes, and if at the expiration of that time I

had drank the medicine I should be taken to the theatre that night. As soon as she had left the room I went to the window to have a look out, previous to making a last desperate effort to take the terrible draught. The first object that met my view was Dick Turpin coming up the street towards our house, and the sight of him inspired me with a plan by which to get rid of the obnoxious mixture. Softly opening the window I beckoned to him, and seeing from my looks and gestures that something requiring prompt action was in the wind, he rapidly and quietly approached. I informed him in a whisper of the unhappy situation in which I was placed, and handing the glass containing the medicine to him, requested him to go a little lower down the street, out of the sight of the windows of our house, and throw the draught into the gutter, and then return as speedily as possible with the glass. But the proposed stratagetic movement unfortunately proved a failure, for my companion had scarcely got the glass in his hand when we were startled

by a loud and energetic rapping at the window of the opposite house, the lady of which, it appeared, had been watching our guilty movements. My mother, who was in an upper apartment, heard the knocking, and instantly divining something like the truth (her idea was that I was throwing the medicine out of the window), rushed down stairs, and taking me red-handed in my attempt to dispose of the draught, at once put that horrible compound to its legitimate use in a very summary manner, at the same time soundly boxing my ears, a proceeding which I believe did more than the medicine towards dispelling the dull, heavy feeling which was part of my complaint.

Of my several fights during these two years, one was with my friend Turpin, and arose, as misunderstandings among older and wiser people have not unfrequently arisen, out of a rivalry in love. Love, which we are told rules the court, the camp, and the grove, will occasionally enter the schoolhouse, and especially where boys and

girls attend the same school. Although perfectly isolated during school hours, the boys and girls of the Dockington borough schools, many of whom were brothers and sisters, and the bulk of whom came from the same districts and belonged to the same class of society, and who "let out" of school and went backwards and forwards to it at the same hour, were constantly in the habit of mingling together out of doors, and a great deal of such sweethearting as goes on between boys and girls of from eight to fourteen years of age took place among them. This sweethearting was much more in the conventional style than the unsophisticated love-making to which I had been accustomed in Mrs. Wilson's school, and for a year I took no part in it, but roamed in school-boy meditation fancy free, so far as any idea of love was concerned. At that time, however, there came to the school a girl named Ellen Gibson, in whom I met my love fate. She was a bright-eyed, dark-haired, rosy-cheeked, plump-made little girl, about nine years old, and to her natural ad-

vantages added that of being better and more tastefully dressed than the majority of her schoolfellows. She was a finished juvenile coquette, and soon captivated a number of the boys, and among them Dick Turpin, who after a time proved the most successful of her suitors, and came to be regarded, even by his defeated rivals—with two or three of whom he had fought on the question of their respective pretensions—as Nelly's sweetheart proper. He almost invariably escorted her home from school, and in the mornings she was often seen at the end of the street in which she lived waiting for him to come up, so that they might go on to school together. They had been detected kissing too, and it was known that she had knitted him a pair of garters, and that he had presented her with a new thimble, while to Butcher and me he had shown a note that he had received from her, asking him to meet her on a Sunday afternoon. But though to all appearance unassailably fixed in Nelly's good graces, Turpin took every precaution to insure and main-

tain his position. He promptly warned off any other boy whom he imagined was after her, and knowing that both Butcher and Bryan had been among those who had striven to attain the position which he now held, he avoided their company whenever he was with Nelly.

"I'm down on them two, Johnny, you know," he observed to me in confidence, "because I know they want to go with Nelly if they can, and wouldn't care a bit about pushing me out, and that wouldn't be fair, would it now?"

I of course replied that such a proceeding would be highly unfair, to which Turpin replied, "Of course it would, Johnny; and what's more, I don't care about Frank coming with us,—not that I think he's after her, but, don't you see, he's such a stunner at telling nice stories that she might go after *him*. But," he added, in an immensely friendly tone, as he concluded the justification of his conduct in eschewing the presence of his other friends when his lady-love was with him, "you may come along with us, Johnny; I know you're all right."

And so I began to go home from school in company with Turpin and his sweetheart, at first under the impression that I was really conferring a favour on him by doing so. At the commencement I was perfectly heart-whole, but like most others who approached her, I soon began to fall before the charms of the all-subduing Nelly, and at the end of a week was helplessly in love with her. Left to myself I would probably have never told my love, but Nelly was too experienced in the ways of juvenile love-making not to perceive how I was affected towards her; and her conduct on making this discovery was of so encouraging a character that it impelled me to speak out. At first I walked on the off side of Turpin, who, when once by the side of Nelly, scarcely spoke to me. She, however, would occasionally glance towards me, and in doing so would catch my eye fixed admiringly upon her, and notice my confusion and blushes at being detected. After this she began to address some scraps of her conversation to me, and in a day or

two, affecting to find a difficulty in talking to me in the position in which I was placed, she invited me to walk on the other side of her, and then, for the first time, it began to dawn upon Turpin that he had taken a serpent to his bosom. On the following afternoon, as I afterwards knew, he attempted to add me to the list of those to be avoided, by hurrying away from me and urging Nelly to "come on." But Nelly had answered, "O no, let us wait for Johnny;" and she being of an imperious character, he had to wait, and I walked home with them, and enjoyed a large share of Nelly's conversation, and received a sly squeeze of the hand from her at parting. When going to school on the following morning I saw Nelly waiting at the corner of her street, and would, as by a tacit arrangement I had hitherto done, have passed on with some slight interchange of courtesies, leaving her to wait for Turpin, but as I was moving away she laid her hand upon my shoulder, saying, "Wait a bit, Johnny, if he isn't in sight by I count twenty, I'll come with you,"

and Turpin not appearing within the specified time we went off together.

"Don't say anything to Dick," she said, when we reached the school, "and look sharp out at four o'clock, or else he'll be wanting to go on without you; but I wont, Johnny," she added, with an expressive look.

"Wont you, though, Nelly?" was all that in my ecstasy I was able to gasp out.

"No, I wont," she repeated; "and if you'll meet me soon to-morrow morning we'll come together again, for I'd as soon come with you as him, and sooner of the two—there."

"And I'd sooner go with you than anybody," I exclaimed, seizing her hand.

"Well, then, you shall if you like, Johnny," she said, and the bell ringing at that instant, I answered, "all right," and rushed off.

But it was not all right. Turpin, on reaching the trysting place and not finding Nelly there, had waited about until he was late for school, and got a caning in consequence; and with his

temper thus already soured by disappointment and the cane, he was informed of the joint treachery towards him of his sweetheart and the friend he had trusted—was told not only that we were seen going to school together in the most loving manner at the very time that he was making himself late by waiting to keep the broken appointment, but also many additional circumstances that were merely suspected or imagined by those who told them. He had to nurse his wrath till dinner-time, and then, as soon as we were outside, he seized me by the collar, and fiercely demanded to know what I meant by trying to sneak his sweetheart from him. I was still under the spell of the delightful interview of the morning, and so boldly replied that I supposed a chap might go with a girl if she liked to go with him.

"O no, they can't," replied Dick, giving me a shake; "not if they're another chap's girl; and if you don't promise not to go with Nelly again I'll give you one in the ear. Will you promise?

"No, I wont," I answered, emphatically.

"Well, then, you're booked for station," he said, and was about to follow up his words by a blow, when Billy Butcher, who was among those standing round, cried out, "O hold on, Dick, you mustn't hit him like that."

"Who'll hinder me?" asked Dick, defiantly, and still keeping hold of me.

"Well, I'd have a try if it came to that," replied Billy, quite coolly; "but all that I want is fair play for Johnny; so, if you're going to hit him, have a fair fight for it."

"He daren't fight me; I only wish he would," said Dick, giving me another shake.

"Well, loose him, any way," said Butcher, snatching me from his grasp; "and now you have a try at him, Johnny," he went on, lowering his voice so as to be heard only by me, "and you can give in after a round or two, for he's a good bit bigger than you, and it'll be no disgrace to you."

Before I could reply, Turpin again advanced

to me, brandishing his fist, and in a decisive tone asked, "Do you mean to fight me, or to have one on the nose without fighting?"

"Well, I didn't want to fight," I answered; "but if I must, I must;" and having pulled my jacket off while speaking, I was the next instant facing him in pugilistic attitude. There is no need to go into the details of the fight. At its commencement I was in anything but a fighting mood, but after the bustle and hitting—of which I received the lion's share—of the first two rounds, my blood was thoroughly up, and I went at it with as savage an energy as the jealous Turpin himself; and though I had throughout much the worst of the combat, it was not until half an hour's hard fighting, in the course of which I had got a black eye and a bloody nose, and been otherwise considerably damaged, that I yielded to Butcher's advice to give in.

In the course of the afternoon, the news of the fight and the matter out of which it had

arisen, spread through both the boys' and the girls' school; and Nelly, of course, heard among the rest of the combat that had taken place in her honour, and much curiosity was excited in both schools to see how she would act under the circumstances, the general opinion being that she would go upon the principle of "woe to the vanquished." This, however, she did not do. Whether it was that she was already getting tired of Turpin, and wished to get rid of him, while at the same time gaining the credit of acting generously by one who had fought and suffered sore defeat in her behalf, or whether my conduct in fighting one above my own size for love of her, had developed the predilection she had already shown for me into a real love fit, I know not; but when, having been conquered in war I thought to yield in love, and was accordingly about to go home by myself, Nelly walked away from Turpin and joined me; and, elated by this signal mark of her favour, I determined to stand by her, even at the hazard of another

fight with Turpin, whom I saw bearing down upon us with a view of asserting his position.

"Hulloa! Mr. Robinson, you're after my girl again, are you? I suppose what you got at dinner-time wasn't enough for you?" he said, stepping before us so as to bar our way.

"No, he isn't after me," said Nelly, taking up our joint cause; "and if there's any going after, it's me that's going after him; and whether or not, I don't want *you* coming after me any more, so I tell you plain;" and so saying, she swept away, leaving Turpin in a very undignified position.

For some months after this, Nelly and I were regular sweethearts, going to and from school in company, sharing our ha'porths of sweets and apples, lending story-books, exchanging our little gifts, generally consisting of coloured garters and book-markers, with "Remember the Giver," and "I Love You," worked in them upon her part, and halfpenny needle-cases and thimbles, and pen'orths of coloured beads upon mine, and otherwise demonstrating our love for each other. And upon one oc-

casion, when we played truant together in order to see an Odd Fellows' procession, we wrote forged notes of excuse for each other, she writing in the character of my mother, while I wrote as her father.

After our fight Turpin broke with our set for a time, but he soon found consolation for his disappointment in love. The sister of one of the boys with whom he now became intimate was a fine bouncing young woman of twenty, who served behind the counter in a confectionery establishment, and happening to meet her one of her Sundays out, Dick fell desperately in love with her. Under the influence of this new passion he went to her shop on the Monday for a ha'porth of "all sorts," and being received with a smile, and getting more than double weight for his money, he came to the satisfactory conclusion that his passion was returned, and from that time he spent all his coppers in sweets, in order to have opportunities of seeing his sweetheart; and though his courtship never advanced

beyond his receiving extra weight of all sorts, and a smile or word of recognition, he could imagine the rest, and was happy. Unfortunately for himself, however, he began to boast of his conquest, and took his more intimate friends to the shop to gaze at the young lady through the window, and these in their turn taking others, there was often to be seen a group of the schoolboys peering into the shop, and giving vent to such exclamations as—"That's her!" "That's Turpin's sweetheart!" "That's the one that gives Turpin a pen'orth of all sorts for a ha'penny!" The girl noticing this, and it also coming to her ears that Dick was trading upon her liberality by buying sweets for other boys on condition of receiving a share of the overweight, she gave him a peremptory dismissal, at the same time cruelly undeceiving him as to the nature of her regard for him, by reading him a severe lecture on the necessity of *children* knowing how to behave themselves. Soon after this I quarrelled with the fickle Nelly on account

of her too favourable reception of the attentions of one of my rivals, and the fellow-feeling arising out of our mutually love-lorn condition led to a reconciliation between Dick and me, and to his return to his old place in our set.

Although from the manner in which it originated the fight between Turpin and me was regarded with considerably more interest than the ordinary run of fights arising out of disputes about marbles and other things of that kind, it sank into insignificance compared with one in which Billy Butcher was a principal, and fought in defence of our common friend Frank Meadows. Frank, as has already been noticed, soon became a favourite in the school, and this and his weakly appearance saved him, in a general way, from the rough usuage to which most of the other boys were more or less subjected. But in a school of six or eight hundred boys there is almost certain to be found some uncompromising tyrant, and the Dockington Borough School formed no exception to this rule. The bully, in this case, was a boy

in the second-class, nick-named "Turk." At the time I entered the school, he was about eleven years old, and a stout, tawney complexioned, determined-looking boy. He was a recognised incorrigible, and his attendance at the school was of an intermittent character. Occasionally he would play truant for a week, and would on the following Monday be brought captive to the school by his father, who, after stating his offence and that he had soundly thrashed him, would request the master to do likewise, a request with which, it need scarcely be said, Ashplant fully complied. At other times he would get a place as an errand boy, and be absent for a fortnight or three weeks, at the end of which time he was generally discharged, in consequence of a confirmed habit that he had got of stopping to play when on his errands, and would then return to school, all the worse from his further intercourse with the street boys, who were his chosen companions during his brief periods of service. He had taken a place at the conclusion of the holidays, and indulged

himself in an additional week's holiday on being discharged from it, and so did not return to school until Meadows had been there a month. Having thrashed one of his class-mates, who, he had been informed, had expressed a hope that he would never come back to the school, and been himself thrashed by Ashplant, who detected him in the act of "showing bacon," he began to make inquiries as to which of the old boys had left and what new ones had come.

The mere fact of any boy being a general favourite was with Turk a sufficient reason for bullying him, and on finding how well Frank was established, and that he had, by common consent, been exempted from the rough play to which stronger boys were subjected, he commenced to badger and harrow him in a variety of ways.

Many of Frank's friends would have liked to have resented this on his behalf, but the bigger boys in the school were a set by themselves, and never interfered among the younger boys; and not even the best of those about Turk's age cared

about tackling him. If, as is often asserted, a bully is as a rule a coward, Turk was an exception to the rule. He had both pluck and stamina, and from being frequently engaged in pugilistic encounters, he had acquired a considerable degree of science. He had fought his way up in the school, and though he bullied boys much less than himself, he was always willing to fight any boy as big or even bigger than himself, who cared about standing between him and his victim; and he was always willing to be put forward or to put himself forward to fight "any one of his own size" in any school or body of street boys, with which our school happened to be at war, and in these champion encounters he generally proved victorious, and always fought courageously and well. Owing to this latter circumstance he was, notwithstanding his tyranny, regarded with a certain degree of popularity in the school, and indeed, apart from his bullying propensities, he had many of the qualities which make a boy deservedly popular with his schoolmates. He was a daring leader

in any movement in which pluck and dash were required, and he was as true as steel to his comrades. If, as often happened, from his general bad character, he was accused of some piece of mischief of which he was not really guilty, he would stand to be caned rather than save himself by naming the true culprit, though he would sometimes indemnify himself afterwards by thrashing the offender. On the other hand, if another boy was blamed for his misdeeds he would confess his guilt and take the punishment, rather than let the innocent suffer; and though so ready to cuff and bully his young school-fellows, he was always the first to show fight in their behalf if any boy outside the school attempted to molest them.

In Frank Meadows' case, however, Turk carried his tyranny to extremes, not so much from any special dislike to Frank, as out of a spirit of defiance to the rest of the boys, who he saw were inclined to make a pet of him. Frank bore the cuffing and badgering to which Turk subjected him very patiently; but Billy Butcher was awfully

incensed about it, though, as he did not consider himself a match for Turk, and knew that any remonstrance would lead to a challenge from that pugnaciously-disposed gentleman, he was compelled to restrain his resentment for the present; but, as events proved, he had from the first determined to make a stand in favour of his friend, and was merely biding his time.

The Tinman's family were very fond of Frank, and proud of his learning, of which they entertained the most exalted notions, and they were always glad to see Butcher, or any other of their nephew's more intimate schoolmates about the house. When calling for Frank, Butcher would often put the gloves on with the youngest Tinman, who, though much stiffer, was very little taller than himself. At first he threw his arms about very wildly, but after a while he began to be able, as old Tom put it, to "use his mauleys to rights," and from this point the boxers took an interest in him, teaching him how to "stop, prop, and get away," and initiating him into the

mysteries of the half-arm hit, the upper cut, and other scientific movements of the pugilistic art. Even at his best he had but small chance with the "Little Wonder," who merely played with him; but when, using their caps as boxing-gloves, he set-to with Mickey Bryan, or any other of the boys in the street, his marked improvement in the fistic science became apparent.

It was on our congratulating him on this circumstance one day as the Christmas holidays were approaching, that he confided to us that his motive in learning to spar was to be able to have it out with Turk for knocking Frank Meadows about. But though Billy had fully made up his mind to beard Turk in respect to his bullying Frank as soon as he thought he would have a reasonable chance of success in the fight which he knew must ensue upon his interference, a considerable time elapsed before he could carry out his determination. Frank was going in for a prize, and for some weeks before the examination seldom went into the play-ground, so that Turk

had very few opportunities of persecuting him. On reassembling after Christmas, Turk did not come back to school, having, as he had done in the Midsummer holidays, got himself a place, this time in a cotton factory. As a month passed without his returning among us, we began to make up our minds that this time he was really going to stay at work; but on the fifth Monday he reappeared in his class, having, as he informed us with an injured air, been discharged from the factory for "only giving another lad a peg in the ear." Turk soon resumed his former habits in the school, and among them that of tyrannizing over the smaller boys in general, and Frank Meadows in particular; and seeing this, Billy resolved to bring matters to a crisis, and an opportunity for his doing so occurred on the Thursday of the week of Turk's return. On the afternoon of that day the game of horse-racing was going on in the play-ground, and among one of the sets of horses that Turk pressed into his service was Frank Meadows, whom he made take the post of

bearing-horse. In one of the races Frank fell from weakness, and on rising asked to be placed as one of the front horses instead of being bearer, but to this Turk would not consent, and was about to make him go down again, when Billy Butcher stepped up and interposed by saying, "Why, he isn't strong enough for a bearer; you might see that."

"He'll have to be a bearer, anyway," replied Turk, in whom the spirit of opposition instantly rose.

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Billy, pushing Frank behind him as he spoke.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Turk, in a contemptuous tone.

"Well, I'll just tell you what I mean," said Billy, firing up at finding himself so lightly held; "I mean that he's not strong enough to be bearer, and if you try to make him go down again, it'll be you and me for it, for them as touches him touches me; that's the way to say it."

"Oh, that's what you want, is it?" said Turk.

"Well, I'll soon touch you," and as he spoke he struck at Billy, who, being on the alert, stopped the blow with his left, at the same time landing a sharpish hit on Turk's mouth with his right. As soon as a blow had been struck, those who had gathered round during the dispute fell back so as to form a ring, and Turk and Butcher being alike eager for the fray, the fight instantly commenced, amid the breathless excitement of the lookers-on, who could scarcely believe their own eyes on seeing the redoubtable Turk tackled by one younger and rather less than himself. A couple of scrambling rounds, in which neither of the combatants were much damaged, had been fought, and they were facing each other for a third, when the bell rang, and Butcher having nodded acquiescence to Turk's observation, "We'll meet outside," they joined their classes and went into school. On going out, Billy was met by his opponent, who came up, and in a very matter-of-fact way asked, "Well, Butcher, shall we have our scrap over now, or shall we leave it till Saturday, when we'll have more time?"

"Well, I think we'd better leave it to Saturday," answered Billy, with equal coolness; "we can fix on a place to-morrow, and only tell so many a side, and then we wont have all the school after us."

To this Turk was quite agreeable, and on the following morning all preliminaries were settled at a meeting in the playground. The ground selected lay about midway between the homes of the principals; ten in the morning was to be the hour of meeting, and the spectators were to be limited to twenty a side, though, as was to be expected, a considerably greater number of the boys managed to get "the straight tip." Both parties were punctual to their appointment on the Saturday morning, and at a few minutes past ten the fight commenced, Turpin and Bryan seconding Butcher, while I had the honour of holding his clothes. Billy's frequent practices with the Little Wonder had by this time made him a really clever boxer, and he began to get on to Turk in a style that very much astonished and disconcerted that worthy and his friends. Billy's party,

many of whom had suffered personal violence at the hands of his opponent, were in ecstacies at the cool, clever manner in which their man fought; and when, at the end of the fourth round, Turk was seen bleeding at the mouth, and with his left eye already going black, while Butcher was as scatheless as when he stood up for the first round, they congratulated themselves and each other on the downfall of their foe being at hand, and alternated their cheering for Butcher with taunts against Turk. But the latter, had he been disposed to quote scripture, might have aptly replied to their jeers with, "Rejoice not, O mine enemies;" for though for a long time he got much the worst of the fight, and received an amount of punishment that would have settled any two ordinary boys, he was far from being beaten. His dogged determination and superior weight and powers of endurance proved more than a match for Billy's science, and it was owing to his acting upon one of his more generous impulses that the fight ultimately terminated in a

draw instead of an acknowledged defeat on the part of Butcher. Finding he had no chance at out-fighting, Turk took to rushing in, and though he was met with heavy shoulder hitting, he usually bored in and threw Billy. After a time these tactics began to have their effect, for Butcher, though scarcely touched about the face, began to get very weak from the repeated falls he had sustained, while Turk, though much cut and bruised about the head, was as strong as ever on his legs. Turpin and Bryan were indefatigable in their attentions to their principal, who, despite his weakness, went bravely up round after round, and still continued to administer punishment, though his blows now lacked much of the force that had characterized them at first, and he fell much more readily and heavily under his opponent's rushes than he had in the earlier part of the fight. As round after round he continued to grow weaker, and his chances of success diminished proportionately, his friends strongly advised him to give in, but to this advice he re-

fused to listen, saying, that if he gave in Turk would knock Frank about worse than ever. At length, while some of us were talking to Billy in his corner, Turk, who had divined what was going on, walked up, and holding out his hand, said, "Look here, Billy, I've had enough if you have, and I'm agreeable to shake hands and let it drop if you are." There was a slight pause, during which he looked at Butcher, and then added, in a tone that showed that it had caused him no inconsiderable effort to screw his courage to the sticking point, "I'm sorry now that I knocked little Frank about, and I wont do it again; there now, I can't say any fairer—will you shake hands?"

"Yes," replied Billy, emphatically, grasping Turk's extended palm; "and give you the best too, if you like."

"O no," answered Turk, "we've both done our best, and that's all the best there shall be about it, and if anybody says either of us was licked, we'll both punch their heads, that's about

the size of it." And if, as he glanced fiercely around him as he said this, any of those who had scoffed at him when he appeared to be about to suffer defeat had unpleasant forebodings of retaliation upon his part, their premonitions were prophetic; for though Turk's tyranny really arose more from a desire to command, and the light regard in which he personally held rough usage, than any innate cruelty in his character, and though his propensities in this respect were subsequently greatly modified under the influence of Frank Meadows, one of whose warmest friends and admirers he in time became, he took an early opportunity of "warming" some of those who had shown their undisguised joy at the prospect of his downfall.

CHAPTER III.

STORY-TELLING—EVENING READINGS AT TOM THE TINMAN'S—WE GET UP AN AMATEUR PERFORMANCE, CONSISTING OF A "NEW AND ORIGINAL DRAMA," AND OTHER ENTERTAINMENTS.

FTER this fight, Butcher was regarded as one of the cocks of the school; and Frank Meadows, when Turk also had come under the spell of his story-telling powers, and been added to the list of his friends, was freed from all danger of being flogged. Among working-class schoolboys, a good story-teller is held in high esteem, as story-telling is one of the chief amusements of their winter evenings. The smallness of a working-class household in a great measure precludes any idea of in-door sports for young boys, who, consequently, are in winter as well as summer sent out to play; and when a

number of them meet at some favourite point of assembly, a frequent and readily agreed-to proposition is, "Let us tell tales."

At the corner of our street was a large baker's shop, the oven of which being underground, warmed the flagged pavement above, and this piece of pavement was our place of meeting for tale-telling. Here, with our backs against the wall of the shop, we would sit in a row, Frank, as our leading contributor, being in the middle, and each in his turn would tell some story "original or select." The tales were always of the kind that commence with "Once upon a time," and were concluded with that stock prologue to such stories, which runs—

> "Be, bo, bended, my tale's ended.
> If you don't like my tale, go to Wales
> And buy copper nails,
> And come back and mend it."

The tales most in favour amongst us were those of a blood-freezing character, relating to ghosts, murders, and other natural and supernatural horrors, the mere recital of which made

us huddle together in affright. When I had supped full of these horrors, I would hurry home, my imagination filled with "calling shapes and beckoning shadows dire;" and walk in the middle of the road in order to give as wide a berth as possible to the entrances of courts and passages, out of which I momentarily expected some of the terrible beings of whom I had been hearing to dart upon me, and bear me away. On getting home, I would resort to all kinds of schemes to avoid being sent to bed; but at eight o'clock I had to go, in obedience to my father's rule on that point, and, horror of horrors, to go in the dark, too! for having, when I had formerly been entrusted with a candle, kept it burning for hours as a spell against ghosts. Many a night I have been literally chased upstairs, and for hours after I was supposed to be asleep have been sitting shivering on the landing, in order to be within the sound of my parents' voices. And when, on hearing them about to come upstairs I crept into bed, I have buried my head under the

clothes and lain in an agony of terror, fully impressed with the idea that some brawny ruffian, armed to the teeth and bent on murder, was concealed under the bed, or that the ghost of the headless robber, or of the little girl who nightly haunted her cruel stepmother, repeating in a ghostly voice—

> "My mother did kill me and bake me in pies,
> My father did eat me and say I was nice;
> My two little sisters came picking my bones,
> And buried me under cold marble stones,"

were flitting about the room. Of the indescribable agonies that I endured in the course of these nights of terror, my parents had but a faint conception, and it was not till I had one night been literally frightened into fits, that they became fully alive to the distress of mind under which I laboured, and took steps to remedy the evil.

On opening my bed-room door one night, I stepped right against a tall, spectral, white figure, which appeared to make a clutch at me. With a howl of horror I rushed back, the figure pursu-

ing me. Whether I ran down the stairs, or, maddened by terror, took a reckless "leap in the dark," I know not, but on hastening up from the kitchen, my mother found me lying senseless on the landing, with the object—a long broom with a white table-cloth tied over it—that had brought my terror to a climax lying beside me. Throughout the night I relapsed from one fainting fit into another, and for several days afterwards was confined to my bed. During these days I fully unburdened myself to my parents, who from that time took every care to eradicate ghostly apprehensions from my mind.

The trick by which I suffered so severely was very easily explained. A neighbour's daughter, who occasionally came to our house to assist my mother in her work, had noticed my reluctance to go to bed, and with a view, as she put it, of curing me of my fears, had placed the figure at my bed-room door, in such a position that when I struck against it it would slide down the stairs after me. The want of sense or thought, or the

disregard for the feelings of others, which among servant girls and others—sometimes even mothers —entrusted with the care of children, leads to the perpetration of tricks of this kind, and to attempts to keep children quiet with threats about "Buggy-boo," big black men, ghosts, and the like, is often the cause of unspeakable agony, and irreparable injury to the children. Many a mind has been weakened or shattered by such practices, and the phases of ignorance and brutality which lead people to fill an infant mind with images of terror, or play off some ghostly practical joke upon a boy or girl who is known to be in fear of supernatural apparitions, are more to be reprehended and more dangerous, both to the children personally concerned and society at large, than are even those which lead to physical ill-usage.

During my second winter at the Borough school, our set happily fell into a more healthy mode of spending their evenings than in telling horrifying stories. Frank Meadows in that winter suffered much from ill-health, and was

often unable to come out in the cold night air. In consequence of this, Butcher and the rest of us used to often call to see him in the evening, and generally found him sitting by the fire reading. On these occasions, he would sometimes say, "O, just listen here!" and, without further parley, begin to read us an extract from the book in his hand; and as the pieces he selected were generally of an exciting character and Frank was a good reader, whose heart was generally in his work, we would soon get interested, and give ourselves up to the pleasure of listening to him. A still more delighted listener than any of us boys was old Tom the tinman, who, as has been already noticed, was unable to read himself, and had never hitherto heard anything read save the accounts of "mills" in the sporting papers, and the reports of the more sensational murders given in the weekly newspapers. He would be at work when the reading commenced, but presently he would pause and assume a listening attitude; then, as he became more interested, he would unconsciously

drop his tools and draw nearer to the fireplace, and, as the reading progressed, he would from time to time give vent to a number of such exclamations as, "By Gosh!" "Who'd have thought that!" "I thought it would turn out that way!" "That's the chap for my money!"

So pleased was old Tom with these readings, that he shortly organised occasional readings, upon a regular and to us boys delightful plan. One evening Frank broke off his reading at a very interesting point in one of Mungo Park's travelling adventures, telling us he would read the remainder the next time we came.

"Well, I'll tell you what it is, Frank," said the tinman on hearing this; "if your mates likes to come early to-morrow evening I'll clear the place, and we'll have a proper read, and they can have a scrap of something to eat with us before they go."

To this proposal Frank and the rest of us gave a joyous assent, and the next evening we assembled at the tinman's about six o'clock. Old Tom had got his tools put away in a corner, and a bench

placed for us before a bright, cheerful coke fire, on which a lot of chesnuts were roasting in the shovel. When we had taken our seats the reading commenced, old Tom quietly rising every now and then to attend to the chesnuts, without, however, for a moment withdrawing his attention from the reading, in which he took a warmer and more childlike interest than us juveniles, our attention, truth to tell, being considerably distracted by the prospect of the roasted chesnuts. Frank had himself read the book through, and gave such selections of it as he thought would please us, and at the end of each piece Tom, after making a few of his ejaculatory comments, would pick out what chesnuts were done, and distribute them amongst us, "share and share alike."

I have often thought since that we would have made a splendid group for a painter, as we sat in the circle of the deep ruddy glow of the fire, leisurely peeling and munching the chesnuts, and listening to the reader. The comparative darkness of those portions of the apartment outside the line of the

firelight, would have given plenty of scope for effects of light and shade, while as strong a contrast of character as an artist could desire might have been obtained by a judicious grouping of old Tom —grey, wrinkled, cunning old Tom, who was up to every move of low life, and was not to be "had" by the most astute of sharpers—as he moved about among us, a greater child, for the time being, than any of us; his nephew, the expression of whose wizened old-fashioned countenance was constantly changing, as varying emotions were excited by what he read; and us careless happy boys, whose beaming faces bore testimony to the delight which we derived from our novel entertainment.

When Frank had finished reading, we had supper, consisting of bread and cheese and small beer, and then went home in great glee, and more than ever persuaded that Tom the tinman was one of the greatest characters of the age.

After this we often had one of these entertainments, and in the course of time Turk and

other boys were invited to share in these really "pleasant evenings." Of course when a lot of us got together in this way the readings were sometimes interspersed with conversation upon things in general, and as in the winter some one or other of us would occasionally be taken to the theatre, the drama was a frequent topic of discourse with us. One night when a conversation upon this subject had arisen from Turk giving us an account of a melodrama he had seen on the previous Saturday night, Turpin, who was at all times disposed to be stage-struck, sprang from his seat, exclaiming:—

"I say, lads, let us get up a play ourselves, that'll be the thing!" and then carried away by his dramatic enthusiasm, immediately seized me, and striking an attitude, declaimed his favourite passage from Red Hand the Robber.

We were all delighted with this idea, but could not see how it was to be carried out.

"Well," said Frank, after a thoughtful pause, "I think I could write a play out of my own

head, if uncle would let us have the garret for a theatre."

"Of course I will, lad," said old Tom; "and now you mention it, I think it'll do first rate, it's a tidy size, and we can rig up part of the booth for a stage."

The main features of our proposed amateur performance being thus provided for, the minor details were easily arranged, old Tom offering to put up the stage and make foot-lights for us, and supply us with any properties he could, when on the completion of the piece it should be known what was wanted. On the following day, when the news of our undertaking had spread about the school, we were regarded as quite a set of heroes, and Frank was overwhelmed with applications for the privilege of taking part in the performance, or the lesser honour of being allowed to be spectators of it. In a couple of days Frank had drawn out the plan of his play, and in about three weeks completed the dialogue of it. It was entitled "A Heavy

Reckoning, or The Young Yeoman's Revenge;" and though not as full of murders and terrific combats as Turk, Turpin, and some of the other boys would have liked, it was still a highly melodramatic piece, the plot of which was as follows:—

Albert Harewood (Frank Meadows) enters to the slow music of the volunteer orchestra, consisting of two flutes and an accordion, and in the course of a grandiloquent soliloquy, informs the audience that he is the son of that honest old English yeoman, Abel Harewood, of Harewood Bank Farm, and that having, when about fourteen years old, accidentally discovered that his father was embarrassed, and in danger of losing his farm, he had run away to sea, determined to make his fortune abroad, and then return and re-establish his family. Having acquired the requisite wealth, he has now come back at the age of twenty-two, never having heard anything of his family in the interval, and he expatiates upon the joy it will give him to once more meet the good old man and his beautiful and darling

sister Kate, whom he had left a blooming girl. These reflections upon home bring to his mind the song of "Home, Sweet Home," which he sings, and then goes off. Next enters Lord Mandrake (Turk), the villain of the piece, who in a soliloquy, divulges that he has seduced Kate Harewood and then turned her off, and afterwards sold up her father, and that both the father and daughter had died poor and broken-hearted in the humble cottage of their faithful old servant, Peter Goodman. He confesses that, though by no means thin skinned in a general way, he does not care about thinking of these things, but that to-day he has an uneasy presentiment that something unpleasant is going to happen in connexion with the evil he had done to the Harewoods. But after all he concludes, trying to shake off his forebodings, there's no one who cares for them can injure the rich and powerful Lord Mandrake.

"Don't you be too sure of that, you infernal villain, you," says Peter Goodman (Billy Butcher), entering when Mandrake has gone off, "for if

my old eyes didn't deceive me, that was my beloved young master that I saw going towards the old farm, and if it was, you'll see, my rich and powerful Lord Mandrake, whether or not there's any one who can injure you. At any rate, I don't know the Harewoods if Albert doesn't find means to avenge his sister's wrongs."

At this point Albert rushes in, slapping his forehead, and pulling his hair, and giving vent to such exclamations as—"The old house deserted!" "I fear the worst!" "I know not why, but my heart tells me that some terrible calamity has fallen upon our house!"

While Albert is striding about the stage in despair, old Peter in an aside indulges in some philosophical reflections to the effect that uncertainty is more unbearable than even a knowledge of the worst, and determines therefore to address his dear young master, and tell him ALL. Having come to this decision, he advances to Albert, who seizes him by the throat, and is about to dash him to the earth for breaking in

upon his despair, when he fortunately recognises him. He then gives a start, and holding Peter at arm's length, exclaims—

"What, old Peter Goodman, who nursed me when a boy! Let me embrace thee, old Trusty;" and opening his arms, Peter rushes into them.

When released from the embrace of his young master, old Peter tells "*all*," Albert, as he listens, keeping up a dropping fire of such exclamations as "The dishonourable cur!" "Curse him, he shall pay for this!" "At least, you shall be avenged, Kate, my pretty one!" At the conclusion of the narrative he drops on his knees, and calls upon "old Trusty" to "hear him swear;" and the latter, having struck an attitude by laying his hands on Albert's head, and turning up the whites of his eyes, the last of the Harewoods swears by the earth, the sky, his father's grave, his sister's memory, and a great number of other things, to be avenged upon the monster who had so wronged his sire.

The first act, which terminated with "the oath

of vengeance," was rather barren in situations; but the second act made ample amends in this respect. The first scene of the second act discovers Lord Mandrake in bed, with the ghosts of Kate Harewood and her father on either side of the bed. Having, by way of general introduction, chanted—

> "They who've wronged the Harewood blood
> Never yet have come to good—"

the ghosts go on in the same measure to inform Mandrake that the day of vengeance is at hand for him, and that—

> "The fates shall o'ertake him,
> And demons shall shake him."

As they pass away, they chant in a loud and solemn tone—

> "Awake! awake! thou false Mandrake,
> Awake, with thy soul affrighted;
> Awake! awake! thou doomed Mandrake,
> For the wronged are now to be righted."

When the ghosts are out of sight, Mandrake, who has been groaning and tossing from side to

side during the incantation, starts up wildly, exclaiming—

"Avaunt! horrid vision! Away, away! torture me not!"

His cries alarm the servants, who rush in, asking what ails their lord. To which he replies by howling, "I am haunted by demons; bring lights, quick; let me have lights and wine, ye knaves. Wine! wine!"

Lights and wine having been brought, Mandrake becomes courageous again, curses and kicks the servants, and attributes his disquieting visions to his having been out of sorts. To remedy this, he resolves to summon together his jovial companions and have a carouse, and having signified his intention to his servants and ordered them to "see to it," the scene ends.

The next scene discovers Lord Mandrake and his boon companions carousing, the guests as the curtain rises being on their feet to drink the health of their host. While the toast is yet incomplete, the attention of the revellers is

arrested by a sound of scuffling outside, and then a voice is heard exclaiming, "Out of my path, ye menial pack!" and the next instant, a man enveloped in a large cloak and wearing a slouched hat stalks into the banqueting hall. While Mandrake and his friends are still motionless from surprise, the stranger advances to the table, and taking up a glass of wine dashes it in Mandrake's face, saying, as he does so, "Thus I pledge Lord Mandrake." In an instant all is in confusion, and there is a general cry of "Who are you?"

"Behold!" answers the mysterious visitor, throwing off his hat and cloak, and disclosing the figure of Albert Harewood.

"The brother of Kate Harewood!" gasps Mandrake, as Albert confronts him.

"Ay, her brother and her avenger!"

When something like calmness has been restored, a duel with swords is arranged to take place in "the fir-tree glen," and then young Harewood resuming his hat and cloak, stalks out, muttering as he goes, "His life or mine!"

But though, in the presence of his guests, Mandrake consented to the duel, he had no intention of fighting; and so, when the bulk of his friends have departed, he takes three of them, Ralph Blackstone (Mickey Bryan), Caleb Saunders (Dick Turpin), and Jasper Sagely (Johnny Robinson), who are the "myrmidons" usually employed by him to carry out his wicked designs, and tells them that he cannot meet Harewood, as after his dream of last night he feels that it would be certain death for him to do so; and he also feels, he says, that he will never be safe until this foe is removed from his path, and he offers them a thousand pounds if they will remove him by waylaying and murdering him as he is on his way to the fir-tree glen. To this they consent, and accordingly fall upon Albert as he passes through the wood. Harewood defends himself bravely, and a terrific broad-sword combat ensues. Notwithstanding Albert's desperate defence, numbers prevail, and he is brought to the earth dangerously wounded; but just as his

foes are about to dispatch him, footsteps are heard approaching, and they have to fly. The footsteps they had heard prove to be those of old Peter Goodman, who finding his young master lying on the ground bleeding and senseless, conveys him to his cottage. Here he is restored to consciousness, and is afterwards nursed through the long sickness consequent upon his wounds by Peter's beautiful daughter Alice (played by one of the boys with a voice like a girl, and for that reason nick-named "squeaker"), with whom he of course falls in love. When he has recovered his strength, he determines to renew his pursuit of vengeance, and having come to the conclusion that the unscrupulous Mandrake is no longer entitled to the privilege of fair combat, he effects an entrance into his bed-room in Mandrake Castle, with the intention of stabbing him to the heart as he sleeps. As, with the dagger raised aloft, and muttering "Now for the bloody deed," he glides across the room towards the bed, Mandrake wakes and is awfully terrified at

what he beholds; for his myrmidons having assured him that they had killed young Harewood, he believes that the figure he sees approaching him is a disembodied spirit. On this point, however, he is soon undeceived, and he then begs for his life, till Albert at last says that he will give him the chance of fighting, and producing a pair of loaded pistols, gives him one, and tells him to take up his position. The instant they have taken their stations, Mandrake, without waiting for any signal, fires, slightly wounding Albert, and then escapes through a concealed door, and Harewood knowing that his treacherous and cowardly foe will raise an alarm, hastens to escape from the castle; and thus the second act comes to an end.

The scene of the third act is laid in France, to which country Lord Mandrake had fled to escape from the vengeance of "that demon Harewood;" and to drive away his fears he is indulging in a course of gambling and other dissipations. Meanwhile Harewood, who has discovered the

retreat of his enemy, determines to adopt a slower and more elaborate scheme of revenge than dagger or pistol could afford. He disguises himself, and assuming the name of Sir Charles Harcourt, ingratiates himself with Mandrake, to whom he becomes a sort of Mephistopheles, influencing his every action, leading him deeper and deeper into dissipation, and as his resources become exhausted, recommending him to a money-lender, whom he (Harewood) personates, and thus in time becomes possessed of the whole of the Mandrake estates. When Mandrake has parted with his last acre, his friend Sir Charles disappears, but Albert, in other disguises, continues to dog his footsteps, and be his evil genius until he is reduced to the most abject poverty; and at last, when he is dying of want in a miserable garret, Harewood, throwing off all disguise, confronts him, and addressing him as the murderer of his father and sister, informs him that it is he who has brought him to this miserable end, and then telling him that he leaves him to die un-

pitied and unknown, departs, exclaiming, "The Harewoods are avenged; the young yeoman's heavy reckoning is paid at last!"

The reckoning being paid, there has only to come the concluding scene, in which the virtuous characters are made happy, by Harewood marrying Alice Goodman, and entering into possession of the Mandrake and Harewood estates.

That we boys who were to play in this drama, regarded it as a work of the most pre-eminent genius need scarcely be said. We were in ecstasies over the marvellous cleverness with which it was constructed, and were constantly wondering how Frank could have made it all out of his own head. We looked upon the tags of the old Victoria drama type with which it abounded as the acme of philosophical wisdom, and were quite agreed that Macbeth, which some of us had seen at the theatre royal that winter, and of which we had hitherto been inclined to entertain a very high opinion, was not worthy of being mentioned in company with "A Heavy Reckoning."

Old Tom, too, was highly enthusiastic about his nephew's drama. Strike him ugly! he exclaimed, when he had heard it read, if it wasn't a lot better than any piece he'd ever seen in a theatre, and he'd seen a few; and he expressed the utmost pride in Frank's genius. Frank bore his honours very meekly, merely observing that "it came to him like," and when we had learned the words of our parts, we began to rehearse under his superintendence.

The scantiness of our resources in the way of theatrical dresses had been duly considered in the construction of the play, so that with a little ingenuity we were able to dress the piece sufficiently for our purpose. Turk having to play a Lord, was to dress in his Sunday clothes, till the latter part of the last act, when, being in distress, he was to put on his school suit. A pea-jacket, hairy cap, and top boots belonging to his youngest cousin, served to give Frank the foreign appearance required in the first act, and his Sunday clothes and a black moustache supplied the Sir

Charles Harcourt costume. "Squeaker" had fortunately a sister about his own size, who lent him the dress for the character of Alice Goodman, on condition that she was to have two tickets for the performance—for girls as well as boys were to be admitted as spectators. By carrying a walking stick and having his trowsers rolled up knee breeches fashion, Butcher was costumed for old Peter Goodman, while Turpin, Bryan, and I were transformed into the fierce myrmidons of the libertine lord by merely using our ordinary waist belts as sword belts, and tying on large horsehair beards and whiskers; old Tom, who was to be stage manager and property master, supplying us with tin mounted wooden swords of his own make, and those who took the parts of the guests at Mandrake's banquet, and the gamblers in the French gaming houses, were to appear in ordinary dress.

When the stage was erected, dress rehearsals took place three times a week, and though we of course regarded them in a general way as very

serious affairs, there was often a good deal of fun going on, owing to the mistakes that we made, or to Turpin in the intervals of the play rushing upon some of the other performers, and coming out with his favourite "Ha! ha! Earl Osmond, thy enemy Red Hand the Robber sends thee to hell."

As the play would only last an hour, it was resolved to supplement it with songs by Butcher and Turpin—the former giving a comic ditty, entitled "Going out to Market," and the latter "I'm Afloat! I'm Afloat!"—and the reciting by Frank Meadows of Kirke White's weird ballad of Gondoline, by repeating which on a dark night he had often before given us a blood-freezing sensation. In connexion with this last feature of the evening's entertainment, Turk, Turpin, and some others insisted upon introducing a novel and startling effect, namely, that a dozen of us should give ourselves as witch-like an appearance as we could, and standing round the portable fire with which the garret was to be warmed, play

the part of the witches whose appearance and actions are described in the verses of the ballad, which run

"And round about the cauldron stout
Twelve wither'd witches stood,
Their waists were bound with living snakes,
And their hair was stiff with blood.

"Their hands were gory too; and red
And fiercely flamed their eyes,
And they were muttering indistinct
Their hellish mysteries.

"And suddenly they joined their hands,
And utter'd a joyous cry,
And round about the cauldron stout
They danced right merrily."

Frank was at first opposed to this, but finding his friends determined, he yielded the point; and so, at the conclusion of the various witches' tales—

"Suddenly we joined our hands,
And utter'd a joyous cry,
And round about the cauldron stout
We danced right merrily."

The rehearsals being completed, and everything else in readiness, bills of the evening's

entertainments were written out, and fifty tickets issued to as many of the favoured boys and girls of our schools. The eventful evening on which the performance was to take place, like other eventful and eagerly looked-for times, came in due course, and by a few minutes before six o'clock—at which hour the curtain was to rise—every ticket-holder had arrived; among the female portion of them being Nelly Gibson, and one or two other beauties of mark, whose presence was calculated to incite the actors to do their utmost.

The low-roofed, bare-walled garret, with the "walk-up" platform of old Tom the tinman's boxing booth as a stage, an open coke fire to which the trap-door in the roof served as a chimney, and the seatless auditorium, made perhaps as strange and rude a theatre as well could be imagined; but notwithstanding these drawbacks, the childish audience assembled within it on the first night of "A Heavy Reckoning," was as joyous and expectant an one as was ever gathered

together within the walls of the most elegant "temple of the drama."

As the plot of the drama has already been given, there is no necessity to go into the details of the performance. Suffice it to say, that notwithstanding one or two hitches, it went off in a gloriously successful manner. Each actor upon his entrance was received with a round of cheers, every "point" and moral tag was received with marks of appreciation, and the "terrific combat" brought down thunders of applause; and at the conclusion of the piece, the whole of the performers were called before the curtain. Billy Butcher's song excited roars of laughter, and was rewarded with an encore, an honour which was also awarded to Turpin's song; and the grand witch dance in "Gondoline" raised the excitement and applause to sensation pitch. At the end of the performance the actors came among the spectators, and those who had sustained the principal parts were warmly congratulated by their friends; and then, three cheers

having been given for Frank, and three more for his uncle, the audience took their leave, highly delighted with the entertainments they had witnessed, and deeply impressed with the superior cleverness of Frank Meadows, Billy Butcher, and Co. This first performance had been a gratuitous one; but in the following week we gave another performance, to which we charged a halfpenny each admission, in order to raise a fund for the purpose of getting up a supper to celebrate our dramatic triumph; and so favourable was the impression created by our first performance, that by the second one we realized half-a-crown—a sum amply sufficient to furnish forth a substantial supper of bread and cheese and small beer, and roasted chesnuts.

In such amusements as these many of our winter evenings were right pleasantly spent. At other times we engaged in games of "I spy," or when the state of the weather admitted of it, snow-balling and sliding; and for some time before the fifth of November, our spare time was

fully occupied in preparing for the due celebration of Guy Fawkes' festival, while practising carols and going about singing them generally gave us evening employment for some weeks before Christmas-time.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEFEAT OF ASHPLANT, AND THE EVENTS LEADING THERETO.

DURING the course of the two years, some of the incidents of which have been epitomized in the two preceding chapters, a series of events took place which culminated in Ashplant's having to resign his place in the school.

The position of a master in a school of the class of the Dockington borough school is a most trying one, and a man must be possessed of many valuable qualities of mind and temper to fulfil its duties with credit to himself and profit to his pupils. He must not only be a sound English scholar, but he must also have the somewhat rare art of imparting knowledge to

young and unformed minds—an art the chief difficulty of which is to ever keep in remembrance, that what to a man may appear simple and self-obvious, may to a young boy seem complicated and inexplicable, until it is made clear to him by some analogous illustration suited to his comprehension. He must be of an even, patient temperament, have a high sense of justice, and be firm without being severe.

One of the most critical features of the position of a schoolmaster of this rank is the administration of corporal punishment. Whatever views may be entertained on the question of corporal punishment in respect to smaller and more select schools, or those in which the pupils are nearing adult age, there are, I fancy, very few people having a practical acquaintance with the class of school here treated of, who will not be of opinion that it is absolutely necessary, to the maintenance of a proper state of discipline, that a discretionary power of inflicting coporal punishment should be placed in the master's hands.

Many of the scholars are the children of poor, ignorant, reckless, and often drunken parents, who never attempt to correct them in any way, and care very little what they do, so that they do not bother them. They are often sent to school merely to be out of the way, or through the influence of ministers or others taking a personal interest in the poorer sections of the working classes, or of that nondescript class who hover between the criminal and working classes, without belonging definitely to either; or sometimes they only come in an irregular way at the promptings of their own sweet wills, and when out of school are generally subjected to influences which tend to counteract any good they may have gained when in it. In any given instance an appeal to the honour or reason of even such boys as these would doubtless be efficacious for keeping them in order; but as a permanent institution, the knowledge that the cane may be brought in as an ultimate argument, is the only reliable check upon their natural disposition towards disorder

and insubordination. Even among the better class of the boys this knowledge acts as a beneficial restraint, for being in the habit of knocking about the streets when out of school, and having early to learn to "scratch for themselves," they are generally more or less cheeky, and would, when in school, be very much inclined to defy the powers that be, were they not aware that those powers had always an effectual "stopper" in reserve.

But while the possession, by a schoolmaster, of the power of personally chastising his pupils forms in the abstract a powerful agent of discipline, it is only by the exercise of a rare discretion in the practical application of that power that it can be really beneficial to all parties concerned. As to err is human, it may be said that this power is never wielded with absolute justice; accidents, as the advertisements of insurance offices are constantly reminding us, will happen. The most good-natured of men will occasionally get into a passion, and the best of tempers break down under

the exacerbating influences of the work of tuition, and then the cane is oftener applied as an outlet for personal irritation than as a judicial means of punishment. Then, too, all are liable to errors of judgment, and it sometimes falls out that Tommy is punished and Johnny allowed to go free, when their positions would have been reversed had the "ins and outs" of the case been properly understood, so that Tommy, in addition to getting the cane, suffers under the rankling sense of having sustained injustice.

When, however, a master is in a broad and general way just and merciful, boys, after the first smart is over, view such lapses as these in a proper and sensible light. But when a master is constantly severe, overbearing, ill-tempered, and unjust, flogging whenever there is the slightest excuse for doing so, and often without any excuse at all, and in all cases mercilessly, boys bitterly, though perforce silently, resent it—resent not only the mere physical punishment, but also the spirit in which it is inflicted, and a fierce hatred against the master grows up in their hearts.

A hatred thus engendered, the boys of the Dockington Borough School, one and all, entertained towards Ashplant. Flogged and unflogged alike hated him and regarded him as the common enemy of all, for he was not only ill-tempered and unjust but absolutely cruel, taking an unconcealed delight in inflicting pain and making brutal jests upon the fears of his victims. Although a sufficiently good scholar, he was in every other respect utterly unsuited for the position of a schoolmaster; he was of a savage disposition, and his naturally saturnine temper had been further soured by a series of disappointments in life. At one time he had been in possession of a lucrative manufacturing business, but though he conducted it with energy and ability, unexpected fluctuations of trade went against him and he was ruined. Afterwards he took several situations as a clerk, but his intractability of temper had led to ruptures between him and his employers. He then tried a private school but failed, and it was after this that he was, through the influence

of one of the most powerful members of the committee of management, appointed to, and despite his manifest unfitness retained in, the position of second schoolmaster of the Borough school.

He had only been about three months at the school when I went to it, but even then he was in bad odour, and his evil notoriety continued to increase. Parents who do not themselves correct their children generally object to any one else chastising them, however justly, and from this cause unfounded charges of undue severity are often brought against the masters of these large schools. But in our school, not only such parents as these, but also those who corrected their children themselves, and supported recognised pastors and masters in doing the same to a legitimate extent, soon began to find just cause for protesting against Ashplant's unmerciful severity. Mothers came to the school with their boys, and stripping off their upper clothing and pointing to the cane marks about their shoulders, indignantly asked if that was a proper way to

correct any child, and then proceeded to denounce Ashplant as a "nasty savage beast," or "a great cowardly hulk," and threaten to "have the law of him." One woman, in her indignation, even went so far as to shake her fist in his face, and tell him she'd "a great mind to comb his hair;" while a stalwart widow carried matters to the crowning point of—to put it in her own classic phrase—"slapping him in the chops," a performance which highly delighted the boys, some of whom, even at the risk of bringing the enraged Ashplant upon them, laughed aloud on witnessing it. Fathers and big brothers, it was popularly rumoured, had been in search of him to "pay him off" for his cruel treatment of their young relatives; and once, when he had flogged Frank Meadows to an extent that made him ill and feverish for several days afterwards, old Tom the tinman had begged, almost with tears in his eyes, to be allowed to meet him and "give him one."

"There's as much foul play," said Tom, "in

going over the score with one as can't hit you back as there would be in hitting a man that's down." And on this principle he put it, that Ashplant ought to get something by way of a reminder; and as Frank could not administer the reminder, which was Tom's euphemism for a knock-down blow, he considered that he, as his relative, should; and so he entreated to be permitted to "give him one."

"Only one, you know, Franky," he said, "and no names mentioned."

But to this Frank would not listen for an instant; and in his cooler moments old Tom was fain to confess that it was better so, as his dropping on to Ashplant might have led to trouble.

One mode of giving expression to the indignation excited by Ashplant's conduct afforded special delight to those subjected to his tyrannical sway. Many of the boys whom he had come down upon with special severity had been withdrawn from the school and sent to others of about the same class, where to their new schoolmates

they painted their late tyrant much blacker even than he was, so that among the boys of other schools he soon came to be regarded as a veritable demon. He became for a time the talk of schoolboy circles, and all kinds of exaggerated stories were told respecting him. It was said that he stripped boys naked to flog them, that he had attempted to cut one boy's head off, and that he habitually carried a large dagger-knife, and slept with pistols under his pillow. To show their detestation of this satanic scourge of the schoolboy kind, and their sympathy for those of their fellows immediately within his power, the boys of a neighbouring school—who from "letting-out" at a different dinner-hour, were returning to school after we had assembled—would gather together in front of our school to the number of perhaps two hundred, and set to shouting, "Who flogged a little lad till he fainted?" "Who tried to cut a lad's head off?" "Who let a woman leather him?" "Who gave a boy sixpence not to show the cane-marks to

his father?" and a host of other inquiries of the same kind. They would continue calling out a string of these interrogations, either until Ashplant came out to them, or an alarm was raised that he was coming, and then they would rush away, singing—

"Run boys, run boys, run down the lane,
Here's Cocky Handy coming with his cane."

Or,

"Run boys, run boys, run for your life,
Here's Cocky Handy coming with a knife."

These performances gave great satisfaction to us in the school, even though we suffered by the irritation of temper which they produced in Ashplant; and on dark evenings we occasionally joined parties of these boys in getting up similar demonstrations at the private residence of our enemy. But notwithstanding the constant recurrence of such incidents as these, and the coldness with which Mr. Mayfield treated him, Ashplant defiantly held his place; and it was not until, by quarrelling with teachers, coming into collision with bodies of the boys, and ultimately

causing open rebellion in the school, he had made his unfitness for his post so glaring that even his patron could no longer connive at it, that he was requested to resign, and the school relieved from the incubus upon it that he undoubtedly was.

The beginning of the end came a few weeks after our dramatic performance. One day six or seven boys were kept in at dinner time, and placed in the class-room in which those boys condemned to this form of punishment were confined. To be "kept in" was in a general way no very severe penance. After you had been sentenced, a wink to any of your class-mates who happened to live near you, was all that was required to let them understand that they were to call at your house and tell your mother that you had extra lessons to prepare and could not come home, and that she was therefore to send you some bread and cheese, or bread and meat. The provisions were of course sent, and slipped to you at the first convenient opportunity, so that you were not

really kept without your dinner, and if the teacher left in charge of those under punishment was leniently disposed, the dinner-time could be wiled away pleasantly enough by reading any story book you might happen to have with you, or gambling for marbles or brass buttons, at such games as odd or even, or "handy pandy." On this particular day, however, it so fell out that Ashplant had had his dinner brought to the school, and taking advantage of this circumstance, he determined to inflict additional punishment upon those who were kept in. Accordingly he went into the class-room, and having placed his dinner on the stove to keep it warm, announced that he was going to set every boy a task, and that those who could not say theirs on the re-assembling of the classes would "catch it."

Now we know that the sight of means to do ill deeds oft makes ill deeds done, and so it came to pass in this case. The fact that a number of boys were kept in on the day that he happened to have his dinner in the school suggested to Ash-

plant the idea of adding to their punishment, and when, in order to get the books for carrying out his purpose, he entered a large book closet in the room adjoining the one in which the boys were confined, it was probably the sight of the half open door, with the key temptingly placed in the outer side, that gave one of the boys the impulse to make a dash at the closet and lock their tormenter in it. At any rate, while he was groping in the closet, never dreaming of evil, one of the boys *did* lock him in, and then going upon the principle that it is as well to be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, returned to the class-room and coolly ate his (Ashplant's) dinner.

On finding himself trapped, Ashplant began to batter furiously at the door, and after a while the teacher who should have been in charge of the boys, came running up alarmed by the noise, and seeing what had been done, released the infuriated master. The instant he was free he dashed down stairs, and returning with his cane, demanded in furious tones to know who had

locked him up and eaten his dinner. Had the boys been a promiscuous set gathered together from different classes, and for various offences, he would probably have received the required information, but it so happened that they were a set —were schoolmates in school and playmates out of it—and were kept in for some scrape in which they had been joint performers. While their foe had been under lock and key they had agreed not to tell, and despite all his bullying and threatening, they manfully kept their word, and still further exasperated by their firmness, he fell upon them and thrashed the whole of them most unmercifully. This they had expected, and they had further agreed, that in case they were thrashed those of them who had taken no active part in the locking up business should one and all complain to their parents, and try, by getting a number of them to make simultaneous complaints to the authorities, to strike a blow at the power of Ashplant. The result of this mode of action upon their part was, that on the following morn-

ing two of them brought notes from their fathers, while three of them were accompanied by their mothers, letters and mothers alike demanding to know if their boys were to be flogged for others' faults? One of these women was much better educated than the general run of her class, and instead of merely indulging in a lot of senseless abuse of Ashplant, as was the wont of most mothers who came to the school on similar errands, she resolutely "argued the point." Declining to speak with Ashplant, on the ground that he was an interested party, she demanded from Mr. Mayfield an exposition of the school rules under which the boys had been punished; and he being unable either to justify the conduct of his cane-wielding colleague, or give her what she considered satisfactory redress, she ultimately brought the matter under the notice of the committee, who, upon investigating the affair, severely reprimanded Ashplant, and gave him to understand that he must not again go upon the principle—hitherto a favourite one with him—of

thrashing a number of boys in order to make sure of the right one.

This reprimand was administered in private, but, as such things will do, it oozed out, and the knowledge of it among the boys proved the death-blow to Ashplant's misused power. The end was still afar off, but they felt that he had crossed—had been pushed over—the Rubicon of his downward career, and they rejoiced openly and unpityingly, and without anything distinct having been said, a sympathetic understanding sprang up among them, to the effect that they would, one and all, and under every circumstance, do the utmost in their power to make his overthrow final and complete. They knew that the caution that had accompanied the reprimand was a heavy check upon him, and that to a certain extent they had him, and, emboldened by this knowledge, their latent hatred began to burst into flame, and they commenced to show a defiant and occasionally even an aggressive front towards him. Boys to whom he unexpectedly administered cuts across

the shoulders, as he walked about the school, began to "cheek" him, turning upon him and frowningly asking, "What's that for?" or threateningly exclaiming, "I say, you'd better drop that;" or, "Don't you come that stroke again!" Those whom he himself called out of the classes, instead of abjectly holding out their hands on his roaring the command to them to do so, now frequently protested against being punished merely upon his impressions unsupported by evidence.

"I *wasn't* talking to Jones," or, "I *didn't* copy off Brown's slate," they would say; and to his "Yes, you did, sir," they would further answer, "Then you prove it," or, "No, I didn't; ask Brown himself, or ask teacher." At this point of the altercation he would ask, in a furious tone, "Will you hold your hand out?" To which some of them would boldly reply, "No, I won't; I ain't going to be caned for nothing." Notwithstanding which, however, they usually were caned, though by no means so severely as would formerly have been the case; while a still more significant

indication of his weakness, than his general abatement of severity in cases in which the accuracy of the evidence of his senses was firmly disputed, was manifested in his now occasionally "soft-soaping," or even giving coppers to boys whom he had marked with the cane. But though such cases as these now became of daily occurrence, and served to strengthen and keep alive the spirit of rebellion, it was not until the latter end of May—the locking-up affair had taken place in January—that an opportunity occurred for gratifying the universal desire of the boys to bring on a general encounter with their foe.

Though King Charles's day was not a holiday according to the rules of the school, Mr. Mayfield always gave us a half-holiday on that anniversary, so that in course of time it came to be regarded as much a right as the holidays stipulated for in the rules. But as the printed rules were paramount above mere laws of usage, the holiday lay virtually at the option of the head master, and on this occasion Ashplant happened to be

acting in that capacity, in consequence of Mr. Mayfield being away. On dismissing us at dinner time he made no mention of the holiday, but significantly observed that those who did not come back in the afternoon might look out on the following morning. This of course excited the utmost disgust amongst us, and we eagerly commenced to discuss the matter the instant we were outside the gates. Some were of opinion that as Ashplant knew that it was Mr. Mayfield's wish that we should have the holiday, he would not venture to withhold it altogether, but that, desirous of being "nasty," he intended to give us the trouble of going back after dinner, and then to grant the holiday on our reassembling in school. Acting upon this idea, a number of the boys resolved not to come back, but the great majority, believing that he really meant to stop the holiday and thrash those who absented themselves, returned sullenly and reluctantly to school. On the ringing of the bell we "fell in," discontent plainly showing on every face, and as we

stood in line we could see a number of the more reckless of those who had determined not to come in standing outside the gateway jeering at us. The teacher who was ringing the bell also saw them, and continued to ring on for a minute or two longer than usual, in order to give them a chance to come in. Instead, however, of availing themselves of the opportunity thus tacitly offered to them, they commenced to chaunt an occasional couplet, much in vogue among the scholars of schools in which this half-holiday lay at the discretion of the master, and which ran :—

"The twenty-ninth of May is a very happy day,
If you don't give us holiday we'll all run away."

Although very defiantly phrased, this snatch was in a general way merely sung during morning play-time by way of reminding masters of the date; but now it was given in a style significant of an intention to carry out the threat embodied in it in a literal sense. As soon as it was fairly started by those outside, the rear ranks of those in the play-ground took it up, and

despite Ashplant's shouts for silence, "gave it mouth" in a vigorously determined manner. Finding his cries disregarded, Ashplant left his position in front of the first class in order to fall, cane in hand, upon the mutinous singers, whereupon the front ranks immediately took up the song which was momentarily waxing louder and more defiant. While Ashplant was yet slashing away among the back ranks, those outside advanced in an excited manner, and pulling the gates wide open, called "Come on, lads!" and those inside being by this time thoroughly roused, instantly responded to their comrades' appeal by dashing away towards the gate, changing their song as they ran to—

"Run boys, run boys, run down the lane,
Here's Cocky Handy coming with his cane."

For a moment Ashplant was too surprised to make any effort to stop the rush, but quickly recovering himself, he ran to the gates and tried to close them, but those outside held firmly on, and it was not until all but about eighty of the

boys had escaped that he was at last, with the aid of some of the teachers, enabled to pull them to. Choosing to credit that those who had not got out had remained in school voluntarily, Ashplant took a list of their names and dismissed them, it being useless to attempt to carry on school for that afternoon with those few, and after such a scene as had taken place.

On the following morning, Mr. Mayfield came to the school, and Ashplant of course informed him of what had occurred, putting it at the same time, as a matter of course, that all who had run away should be flogged. To this Mr. Mayfield would not listen for a moment, saying that it was preposterous to talk of caning boys by the hundred; and as the spirit of rebellion had been so general, and the rush out of the play-ground had been a simultaneous one, none could be pointed out as ringleaders. And so, though Mr. Mayfield read us a severe lecture, telling us that we ought to be ashamed of ourselves, and that if he could find out the leaders in the affair he

would turn them out of the school, no one was punished, and we felt that we had achieved a signal triumph over our foe, and brought him a step nearer the end of his career. He made no attempt to conceal his chagrin at the turn events had taken, and as far as he could "took it out" by increased watchfulness for the slightest possible excuse for using the cane, while the boys, in return, resolved to avail themselves of the first chance for another general go in against him, and in about a month the wished-for opportunity arose.

The class-rooms, as has already incidentally been mentioned, were upstairs, and having been added to the main building in consequence of the gradual increase in the number of children attending the schools, they had to be built over a portion of the play-ground, which thus became converted into an arcade. In dry weather this arcade was used in common with other parts of the play-ground, but when it was raining we had all to go into it. It was a small, dark space,

which scarcely afforded standing or breathing room for the four or five hundred boys who made up the complement of the school, and there was consequently great crowding and squeezing when all had to go into it, and the weakest of course had to go to the wall. And so, while the rough and strong rushed rejoicingly into the arcade on the first cry from the teachers of "Shelter! shelter!" the weak and timid crept into it with fear and reluctance.

One morning, early in July, a heavy shower coming on just as we had got into the play-ground, we had to go into the arcade, Turk, Turpin, and other bright particular stars of their stamp, as usual rushing into the furthest recesses and commencing to yell and shout, and indulge in all manner of horse play, while the more timid ones got as near as they could to the front in order to avoid their rougher companions, and be able to get into the "open" again with little crushing should it cease raining.

On this occasion, the force of the shower soon began to abate, and when it had come to the point

of a mere light drizzle, through which the noon-day sun was rapidly breaking, the younger boys were about to run into the open ground again. But this Ashplant, who stood in the opening of the archway, cane in hand, would not allow.

"Keep back, it hasn't stopp'd raining yet," he shouted, "and it'll be on heavy again in a minute;" and he enforced his commands by slashing right and left with his ever-ready cane. Now, in a general way, this would have pleased the wilder portion of the boys. They loved the darkness of the arcade rather than the light of the open playground because their deeds were evil, and they could there enter upon performances they could not safely venture upon in the open ground, and they also delighted to see the terror they excited among their more timid comrades. But to be kept in by the malicious tyranny of their common foe altogether altered the aspect of the case, and on it coming down to their end that "Cocky wont let us go out," they at once took counsel against him.

"We'll see whether he'll let us out or not," they said, and in a minute or two they had arranged a plan for putting the matter to a decisive test. About a score of the boldest of them formed into two lines by joining hands, and Turk giving the signal by singing:—

"Bell horses! bell horses! what time of day?
One o'clock, two o'clock, three and away."

Off they started, full run towards their enemy, carrying others with them as they went. Ashplant heard the noise, but did not realize the situation until the advancing foe were right upon him, and then, in stepping hastily back to get room for a swinging cut at them he tripped just at the instant that Turk and the rest of the gang dashed against him, and was consequently thrown heavily to the ground, a lot of the boys going down on top of him. Such an incident as this was altogether unforeseen, but was now turned to account with a promptitude worthy of a better cause, as before the prostrate master had the least chance of rising, numbers of the other boys

flung themselves, and others were thrown by their companions, upon those who were already on the ground, so that Ashplant was soon buried under a suffocating mass. Knowing that the affair would now be investigated, those engaged in it of course tried to give it as much as possible the air of an accident, and so, after giving one or two good squeezes, they began to scramble on to their feet and run off, leaving Ashplant pale and breathless and with his clothes torn and disordered. On learning what had happened Mr. Mayfield himself came into the playground and rang the bell, and as soon as he got us in school commenced a searching inquiry into what had happened, but despite his utmost endeavours he could obtain no information that justified him in caning any one. As in the previous case, hundreds were implicated, so that all could not be punished, and neither persuasion nor threats could induce any boy to name the ringleaders. And though Turk and his gang were shrewdly suspected, Mr. Mayfield, even when angry, was

too just to flog a boy on mere suspicion. Thus all escaped punishment, and our second great encounter with our foe terminated triumphantly for us. We could see that Ashplant was terribly enraged at the manner in which we had escaped, and we began to entertain hopes that he would now leave in disgust, but there was to be yet another and more serious row with him before the school was relieved of his injurious presence.

He again vented his spleen by availing himself of every possible pretext for using the cane, but for some months no special "difficulty" arose out of the mutual hatred existing between him and the boys, and their relations were quietly dropping into their former state, when in November the grand crash came. In the winter our set, in common with other boys who lived at a considerable distance from the school, brought our dinners with us. The eating of the dinner, of course, only occupied a few minutes, the rest of the dinner-time being devoted to telling tales round the stove or playing games specially ar-

ranged. For some time before gunpowder-plot day we were usually busy with our preparations for the celebration of that anniversary; and during the dinner-time on the third of November in this year we were discussing the popular topic, when Turpin proposed that we should go round to the girls' school and frighten those who were staying to dinner by firing our new cannon,—a brass one, for which we had subscribed sixpence. This was agreed to, and on getting round, the main body of us entered into conversation with the girls round the stove, and so arranged ourselves as to screen Frank Meadows, who had been told off to fire the cannon. The explosion was so far satisfactory that it startled the girls and made them scream, but it had, unfortunately, the further and undesirable effect of bringing one of the mistresses from an inner room. On catching sight of her we scampered off as quickly as possible, but could not complete our escape until she had had time to identify Turk and recognise the rest of us as belonging to the second

class, to which most of our set had by this time been advanced.

Shortly after the assembling of the school, the mistress who had surprised us at our artillery practice came and lodged her complaint with Ashplant, who immediately selected his most formidable cane and ascended to the smaller class-room, in which we were with our teacher, a fine large loose-limbed young fellow, named Moore, who was one of the cracks of the Dockington cricket-club, and an adept in all athletic exercises.

"Stop!" shouted Ashplant, the instant he entered the room, and the lesson was immediately suspended.

"March out here you," he shouted next, beckoning to Turk with his cane.

Turk at once obeyed, and Ashplant seizing him by the collar, asked, "How dare you go and fire a cannon in the girls' school?"

"I didn't, sir," answered Turk.

"Come, come!" exclaimed Ashplant, cutting Turk short as he was about to say something

further; "none of your lies, sir; Mrs. —— saw you."

"I know I was there," replied Turk, "but I didn't fire the cannon; and if Mrs. —— says I did, she tells a story."

"If you didn't fire it yourself, you know who did," said Ashplant, shaking him vigorously.

"Well, it wasn't me," answered Turk; and to this answer, despite all Ashplant's shaking and threatenings, he stuck for a considerable time, until at last, exasperated beyond endurance, he blurted out, "Well, I do know, and I wont tell you; that's the way to say it."

"Oh, you wont, wont you?" gasped Ashplant, who was goaded almost to frenzy by Turk crowning his obstinacy with open defiance. "Well, we'll see if I can't make you;" and despite the caution he had received over the book-closet affair, he was about to commence flogging, when Frank Meadows sprang to his feet, and despite Turk's cry of "O, you little fool!" called out, "I fired the cannon."

"Oh, you fired the cannon, did you?" roared Ashplant, releasing Turk and pouncing upon Frank. "Well, then, I'll give you something for your trouble;" and as he spoke he commenced thrashing him in a terribly savage style.

Frank, though possessed of great moral courage, was physically weak, timid, and highly sensitive to pain, and he now screamed and writhed most piteously, as our ruffian master continued to lay the cane about his back and shoulders. Ashplant, who had been worked into a perfect fury by his contest with Turk and the unconcealed looks of approval with which the other boys regarded the latter's obstinate defiance, carried the punishment to an unusual extent—both in character and duration—even for him; and as he still continued to flog without any sign of abatement, while Frank's cries and struggles grew fainter and fainter from weakness, we could see the teacher's cheek flushing and his hands twitching, while Turk—who on being released had merely stepped back a pace or two—

glanced ominously at a heavy leaden inkstand, and the rest of us began to feel fierce and excited at witnessing the barbarous treatment of our favourite classmate. Ashplant was too much blinded by his passion to notice or take warning by these stormy signs, and at length the tempest burst upon him. As Frank was evidently upon the point of fainting, Moore strode up to Ashplant and tore Frank from his grasp, exclaiming as he did so, "Do you see what you are doing? Do you mean to kill the boy?"

"How dare you interfere, sir?" screamed Ashplant, now fairly foaming at the mouth; and as he spoke, he struck the teacher fiercely across the face with his cane.

In an instant the course of the cane was marked by a large livid ridge, and Moore leaped backwards, uttering a cry of mingled rage and pain. For a moment he seemed to lose his head under the agony of the cut he had received, but immediately recovering himself he sprang forward again and planted a terrific shoulder hit

on Ashplant's face. It was literally a crashing blow, the sound as of something being forcibly smashed in being heard all over the room. It was such a blow as men seldom strike twice in a lifetime, a blow in which the momentarily strength-giving influences of pain, hate, and a sense of wrong were added to great physical power and a scientific knowledge of boxing. And as Tom the tinman afterwards observed, when talking over the event—"It was all there, had got all the way home;" for Ashplant had not been able to make the slightest attempt either to ward it off or get away from it, and it was no blame to him that on receiving it he went down as if he had been pole-axed, for nothing born of woman could have stood before it.

The instant the blow was struck, the pent-up excitement of the scholars burst forth. Turk sprang forward, exclaiming, "My life on you, teacher, I'm with you!" and the next moment Billy Butcher, Dick Turpin, and several others of us left our seats, some taking their stand by the

teacher, and others attending to Frank, who at this point fainted outright. Moore at once saw and understood the result of his passionate handiwork, and the sight of it calmed him; but Turk, who was trembling with passion, thinking that Ashplant lay still from fear, advanced towards him, exclaiming "Get up, you great coward; get up, and put the cane away, and I'm bless'd if I don't fight you myself." Here the teacher, who had turned for a moment to look at Frank, came and dragged Turk back just as Mr. Mayfield, who had been alarmed by the scuffling, entered the room.

"Why, who has done this?" he asked, in a tone of mingled alarm and surprise, on seeing Ashplant's prostrate form.

"I have," replied Moore, pointing to the weal on his own cheek as he spoke, "and I'll answer for it; but there's no time for investigation now."

Nor was there, for Ashplant still lay as senseless as a log, breathing in a gasping, laboured manner, and with his countenance already much swollen

and discoloured from the effects of the terrible facer he had received. Some of the other teachers were summoned, and assisted Mr. Mayfield in carrying him into the committee-room, where a surgeon was brought to see him, and after examining him announced that his nose was broken, and his whole nervous system greatly shaken by the shock he had undergone. In about an hour he was sufficiently recovered to be sent home in a cab; and Moore was also sent home, suspended until the next committee meeting.

This meeting took place in about a fortnight, and then Ashplant—who up to that time had not resumed his duties—told his story, which briefly put, was to the effect that he had been unwarrantably interfered with and outrageously assaulted for merely having, in a perfectly legitimate manner, chastised a boy for an offence of which he was confessedly guilty, and of which one of the mistresses of the girls' school had made special complaint. On hearing this, and seeing his damaged face, some of the committee

at once proposed to dismiss the teacher, and advised Ashplant to bring a legal action against him; but others more mercifully inclined, suggested that, as to dismiss him in this manner would injure his prospects for life, and as he had hitherto been a very well-behaved young man, it would perhaps be as well—if Mr. Ashplant would consent—to forgive him, on condition of his paying the doctor's expenses, and apologizing in their presence. Whereupon up sprang the teacher, and in a stormy burst of natural eloquence informed them that he would never ask the pardon of such a man; that he was proud of what he had done, and would unhesitatingly do the same again under similar circumstances. He then went on to denounce Ashplant as cruel, vindictive, unjust, and utterly unfit to be entrusted with the care of children; and he cited instance upon instance of his cruelty in support of his statements. The majority of the committee were greatly astonished at what he said, and could scarcely credit it; but he offered—if time were

allowed him—to bring ample evidence in corroboration of his assertions, and the meeting was therefore adjourned for three days. At the renewed meeting Moore fully discharged his promise. Numbers of pupils and parents were there to testify to acts of cruelty; and Mr. Mayfield, though reluctant to speak against even a bad colleague, was also called upon to give evidence. By this means Ashplant's true character and special unfitness for his position were laid bare, and he was sternly requested to resign.

After leaving the school he tried and failed in a variety of things, until at last he found his true position as a policeman, in which character he soon gained notoriety for the manner in which he "quilted" street boys.

CHAPTER V.

THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF SATURDAY—A QUESTIONABLE FIND—PLAYING TRUANT—OUR SINS FIND US OUT, AND WE ARE "MADE EXAMPLES OF."

SATURDAY was the red-letter day of the week with us boys, its joys being many and various. It was a full-holiday, and for the greater part of it we could roam about at will, or bring off fights or games of fox and hounds, or any other pre-arranged matters of that kind. It was the day on which we drew the weekly coppers allowed to us by our parents, and those promised to us for such services as brushing the lodger's shoes, or running errands for women who had no children of their own; the day on which our new clothes were bought, and when we had

relishes for tea, were permitted to sit up for supper, and occasionally taken to the theatre.

On Saturday we would often be cleaned up in the evening, and taken to market to carry the basket for our mothers—a most delightful job to us, though I fear we must have been much more trouble than profit to our parents. The brilliantly lighted shops and markets, and the bustle and animation incidental to Saturday night marketing, appeared to us an Arabian Nights'-like scene of life and splendour, and very much distracted our attention from the work in hand. We invariably fell behind to gaze in at the grocer's window, in which there was a toy engine, driven by mice; and the real live Chinaman, behind the counter of a rival establishment, was, if possible, a still stronger inducement to loiter on our way. We would pause to examine and admire the pictorial representations of the accidents by which they had been lamed, which the professional begging cripples displayed, or to study the pavement pictures of those artists in chalks,

who, by means of their coloured writing, set forth the alms-inspiring truism that "hunger is a sharp thorn," or the more doubtful information that "they are starving." Unless strictly watched, we would join the knot of listeners gathered round the street minstrels, who trolled out doggerel verses upon passing events, or some of the more widely popular of the Catnach series of ballads relating to the adventures of female cabin boys, black-eyed sa-li-ors, and more especially of a young lady, who was described as—

> "The blooming Rose of England's Isle,
> And the flower of Lancashire."

And further on we would stop to listen to the voluble, slangy, merry-Andrew-like cheap Jack, or the high-falutin qualified practitioner denouncing universal-cure-promising street quacks, who were congregated in a square near the market, and whose coarse stale jokes and inflated semi-scientific jargon we regarded as the *acme* of wit, wisdom, and eloquence.

On getting into the market we were still more

intent upon furthering our own designs than assisting our parents. We would break in upon the bargain-hunting discussions of our parents to tell them that there were *such* large ha'porths of sweets on that stall, and that we only just wished that we had a halfpenny to spare; or that there were first-rate caps, that would just suit us, to be had for a shilling in the next alley. And when any purchase was about to be completed we thrust ourselves forward as prominently as possible, with a view to obtaining perquisites; and, in this way, often succeeded in drawing a halfpenny from the butcher or butter-man, or an apple or two from the greengrocer. On leaving the market, our mothers would sometimes meet our fathers or some of their neighbours, and would go into some respectable public house with them to have their market glass, a refreshment which was very acceptable after the pushing, crowding, and chaffering of a Saturday night's marketing expedition. Here, as drink was of course forbid to us, we generally came in for some of the

"seedy biscuits" of the licensed victualler, or any little delicacy, in the shape of apples or oranges, that our mothers' acquaintance happened to have in their baskets, or perhaps for an "odd copper" from their husbands, and there was generally something going on in the house that interested or amused us. While going homewards too we could, by going on ahead a little, generally manage to purloin a biscuit or a piece of cheese, or something of that kind out of the basket, and the evening's proceedings were crowned by the dissipation of sitting up late and having hot supper.

But alas, even in childhood there is no such thing as unalloyed happiness, and though joy was undoubtedly the predominating characteristic of our Saturday, the day was not without its dark features. The carrying of the market basket was not the only stock work that fell to our lot on Saturday. Other jobs were specially reserved for that day, jobs to which there were no bright bustling accessories, and out of which there was nothing to be got, and the carrying out of

which involved a considerable amount of hard and disagreeable labour. Chief among the Saturday jobs, was the wheeling home from the coal-yard of the weekly allowance of coal, and the bringing from the shop of the flour for the week's baking. The flour was the lesser evil of the two, the principal objection to it being that it was unavoidable, and involved—in our estimation—a loss of time, and interfered with play arrangements. The actual work was clean and not severe, the usual mode of carrying being to place the flour bag inside a large market basket, which was slung pannier-wise across the shoulders.

The coaling, however, was a penance without relief. The place from which we got our coal was about half-a-mile from our house, the coal barrows lent by the Coal Company were heavy, clumsy, ramshackle affairs, the cart roads—in which alone barrows were permitted in Dockington—were paved in a rough and jolt-producing style, and under this combination of *un*fortuitous circumstances my coaling expeditions became of

a disagreeable and arm-distressing character. I have still a painful remembrance of the aversion with which I contemplated this work, and the shifts to which I vainly resorted in trying to escape or mitigate its evils. In the summer we used a hundredweight, and during the autumn and winter months from a hundredweight-and-a-half to two hundredweights per week, and as when I first commenced the work, I was only able to wheel half-a-hundred-weight at a time, I had often to make three or four journeys, so that a whole morning had sometimes to be devoted to this hated business. As I got older, I took to bringing three-quarters of a hundredweight each journey, and thus saved a little time, though at the expense of increasing the arm-ache. If I happened to be flush of marbles, twine, buttons, or any articles of that kind, I would occasionally fee some playmate to come and take "turn and turn about" with me in wheeling my load, but in a general way I had to perform my task alone. The journey had of

course to be performed in spells, and I used generally to fix upon some land-mark—a lamp-post, street corner, shop window, or something of the kind—for the length of my spells, which grew gradually shorter, and the rests between them longer as I got nearer home, where I not unfrequently got my ears boxed for giving some "cheeky" expression to the ill-temper to which my aching arms and the sense of injury under which I always laboured at these times gave rise. Among the wheelbarrows there were degrees of badness, and a great object was to secure one of the best of them, but sometimes after waiting about for a quarter of an hour for this purpose, some bigger boy would ruthlessly seize the favourite barrow, leaving you to do as best you could with one of those you had been manœuvering to avoid. On one occasion of this kind, when I was about half-way between the coal-yard and our house, the wheel of the very bad barrow that I had to take came off, and I was brought to a dead lock. After waiting some

time in the hope of seeing some one I knew, I asked a boy who was standing by if he would watch the coals while I went for another barrow. He consented, and I ran back, but on returning in about a quarter of an hour, behold! my coals had vanished, my watchman who was still at his post, informing me that a passing troop of young street Arabs had swooped down upon them, and carried them away. On being told this, I immediately set up a howl of despair, and was soon the centre of a crowd, some of whom advised me to do one thing and some another. At length a policeman came up, and having dispersed the crowd, helped me to lift the broken barrow on to the other one, and told me to take it back to the yard. Having done this, which was of course the best thing I could do under the circumstances, I had to go home and tell my woful tale—which was by no means graciously received—and get money to go for more coal, as "no trust" was the motto of the yard.

After this I supposed that the force of evil

arising out of coaling could go no further, but in this I was unhappily mistaken, for out of it incidentally arose a series of disastrous accidents by flood and field, compared with which a break-down or the loss of a hundredweight of coal were of small account. One Saturday morning, about eight months after Ashplant had left the school, my mother handed me a sovereign with which to pay for the coal, at the same time giving me many injunctions to be careful about the change. I received a half-sovereign in the change, but on reaching home it was missing, and despite all that could be done in the way of turning out pockets and carefully examining every step of the road by which I had come, could not be found, and as my mother was greatly "put out" at the loss, and attributed it to my not having followed her orders to me to wrap the change in paper, I "got the strap" heavily.

While going to school, in company with Butcher, Bryan, and Turpin one morning about five weeks after this event I felt something strik-

ing lightly on my right shoe, and on passing my hand round the bottom of the leg of my trowsers I felt some small round substance.

"Here's a fadge (farthing) or a button," I said, taking my pocket knife and cutting a few of the stitches holding the cloth and lining together, when behold! from the aperture thus made, there rolled out, not a farthing or a brass button, but a half-sovereign.

"My eye, if it ain't a real half sovereign," said Mickey Bryan, picking it up; "wherever has it come from, Johnny?"

"Oh, I remember," I answered after a brief pause, "it's the one I thought I'd lost, and got a hiding over."

"Well, Johnny, you know 'finding's keeping, losing's seeking,'" said Turpin, with a meaning look.

"But it's my mother's," I said, dubiously glancing interrogatively at Butcher as I spoke.

"Well, I hardly know," said Billy, meditatively; "you've been hided for it the same as if

you had lost it, and it's a tidy while since, and your mother thinks it's gone for good, so I don't know but what you've a right to keep it."

This put the matter in a new light, and on discussing it more fully in the play-ground, it was finally agreed that, as I had undergone all the penalties that would have attached to my really losing it, I was fairly entitled to regard it as my own, now that it had turned up so unexpectedly; and so I kept it.

None of us had ever had so large a sum at our disposal before, and we looked upon it as quite a mine of wealth. That such a sum could be got through within any reasonable length of time, and in an adequately enjoyable manner, unless we devoted our energies exclusively to the work, was a state of things never dreamt of in our philosophy, and it was therefore agreed that we should play truant for a time, in order to carry on the work of spending our prize in a worthy manner. We had before occasionally "bagged" school for a day and escaped undetected, but now

we greatly resolved to go in for a week or two, and "chance it."

At school-time next morning we met Frank Meadows, and told him our plan, and asked him to join us, but he declined to do so, and strongly advised me to return the money, and all of us to go to school; but by this time we were impervious to good advice, and so went on our evil way. Our first proceeding was to change the half-sovereign at a shop at which our parents dealt, and then, having walked to a part of the town where we were not likely to meet any of our neighbours or schoolmates, we indulged in a feed of tarts.

When we had finished the pastry, we set off on a round-about ramble, calculated to land us home about dinner-time, and as we sauntered on gazed in at shop windows, "assisted" as spectators in such street incidents as a fight, the fall of a horse, or the "jollying" of a drunken man or woman, and kept a sharp look out for any purchaseable articles that might suit our fancy. In

this way we came across a second-hand pistol and dagger, which, after some chaffering, we purchased from the marine-store dealer for three shillings and sixpence.

On looking into the state of our funds after dinner, we began to realize the fact that even half-a-sovereign was not quite inexhaustible, and so resolved to economise a little, abandoning all idea of making any further investments in such articles as pistols, and confining our expenditure to fruit, shrimps, biscuits, and ginger-beer, and a visit in the evening to a wax-work show, then exhibiting in the town at "the low charge of one penny." Something in this style the next two days were also passed. We knocked about the streets, patronising the cheap confectioners and proprietors of cheap fruit and sweetmeat-stalls, and one night went into the gallery of the melodramatic theatre, and on the other to the penny gaff. By this time the greater part of our money was gone, and we now began to see that by dint of a little extra exertion we might

have managed to get through it very comfortably on Saturdays and during the evenings. However, having gone so far in our present line, we resolved to have one more day, and then return to school; and as by watching church and shop clocks we had always got home in time, and our parents had no idea of the true cause of our inability to eat our meals, we were in good hopes that our escapade would remain undiscovered. But it was not to be; the fates had decreed that our sin was to find us out.

The weather was very hot, and so, after dinner on this last day of our self-constituted holiday, it was proposed that we should go and have a bathe. We had not time to go down to the shore, and so we arranged to take our dip in a favourite bathing pond, known as the Brickey Pool. This was only decided upon after earnest consultation and deliberation, for the Brickey Pool lay upon a war-path. At this time the boys of rival districts in Dockington were in the habit of going to war with each other, the wars

generally originating in some question of a right of way, attempts to punish or retaliate upon gentlemen who had "snacked" marbles, or a fight between two boys of different factions. On the first breaking out of a war, it would be carried on after school hours and on Saturdays by the young boys of the districts, but in course of time bigger boys, young men and street roughs, would begin to enter into them, and then they assumed a dangerous character. Large mobs of boys and young fellows would meet, and desperate fights with sticks and brickbats ensue, boys being sometimes killed, while combatants, passers-by, and policemen who were brought to quell the disturbance, were sometimes seriously injured.

Now, the Foundry district, in which we lived, was generally at war with the St. Ann's-in-the-Fields district, in which the Brickey Pool was situated. Ours was a densely populated part of the town, while St. Ann's was a new and rather scattered suburb, built on the site of extensive brickfields, some of which were still

left vacant, and were used as a playground by the neighbouring boys, who, on the boys of our neighbourhood also going to play there, would assume a hectoring tone, and if we resented that, drive us off. On the other hand, most of the shops in which the St. Ann's people dealt were situated in the outlying parts of our district, so that by way of reprisals for their driving us off their playground, we would catch and thrash their boys when they were coming upon errands. Owing to this circumstance there was often warfare going on between the districts, and even when they were not at open war, their feelings towards each other were of a who'll-tread-on-the-tail-of-my-coat character, and a rupture was liable to occur at any moment. Still, at this particular juncture, there was a truce which had already lasted a fortnight, and, so far as we were able to judge, everything was in favour of the continuance of peace, and so, as I have said, we came to the conclusion that we might safely venture to bathe in the Brickey Pool.

The half dozen or so of St. Ann's boys who were in the pool when we got there made no objection to our joining them, but we had not been in the water many minutes when we were aware of the approach of about a score more boys, headed by a celebrated young chief of the St. Ann's tribe, nicknamed "Nobby." They were pulling their clothes off as they came along, and one or two of them had already jumped into the water before Nobby made the discovery that there were strangers in the pool.

"Hollo!" he shouted, in a tone that struck ominously upon our ears, "who's these lot?"

"Some of the Foundry lads," answered those who had been there when we arrived.

"Well, I'm blest!" exclaimed Nobby, on receiving this information; "its just like their cheek coming to try and turn other chaps out of their own pool. Come, out you get!" he shouted, waxing virtuously indignant at our supposed aggressiveness.

"Wait a minute or two," replied Butcher, and

then speaking to us in an undertone, he added, "we'd better get out; I can see they want to get up a quarrel with us."

"Wait!" roared Nobby, exasperated at our not instantly taking flight; "wait till you've done with our pool? well, that *is* a good 'un. But I'll soon shift you," he continued, picking up Bryan's garments; "that's the way to bring you lot out," and he flung the clothes into the middle of the pond, and the next instant his companions had done the same with our suits. The clothes were tied in bundles with our scarves, so that we had no difficulty in picking them up, and having done so we scrambled out of the pool, feeling terribly dejected, for we knew now that our truant-playing and other misdeeds would be brought to light. Still, we were too proud to give way to our sorrows in the presence of our treacherous enemies, and so replying to their jeering by muttered threats to the effect that they would be paid off for this, we slipped on our shoes, and carrying the rest of our clothing

under our arms, set off for some brick-kilns that were burning at a little distance, where, on learning our plight, the workmen at once allowed us to dry our clothes. In less than an hour we had thoroughly dried them, but they shrank so much in the process that we could scarcely get them on, and we looked such guys, that by the time we reached home we were followed by a crowd of boys laughing and shouting, and making a variety of such remarks as, that we had got too far through our trowsers, or that our jackets didn't fit us enough, or derisively asking us who nailed their little brothers' clothes, or whether our mothers had any more like us.

We are told that misfortunes never come singly, and our case was not destined to prove any exception to this rule, for during the afternoon letters from the master had been brought to each of our houses, inquiring why we had not been at school, so that our parents now knew that we had been playing truant. And

so on my arriving home, accompanied by that section of the crowd which, on my separating from my companions, had devoted itself more especially to me, my mother dragged me into the house by the "scruff of the neck," and having first nearly shaken the breath out of me, demanded to know what I had been doing to get my clothes in that state, and why I had been playing truant for the last three days. I had before been utterly dispirited, and this rough reception completely broke me down, and I confessed all, from the discovery of the half sovereign to the adventure at the Brickey Pool. This open confession might have been good for my soul, but it was certainly bad for my body, for, seizing the strap, my mother gave me one of the soundest thrashings I have ever had, and sent me tea-less to bed, and on the following morning she took me to school, and having related my misconduct, requested the master to make an example of me. The mothers of my companions had acted in the matter precisely as

mine had done, and so about ten o'clock, when the classes were settled in their places, there was a grand punishment parade. The lessons were stopped, and all the boys faced towards the platform, and then we were marched in and one after another "made examples of."

CHAPTER VI.

WE "PAY OFF" NOBBY, AND SURPRISE AND DEFEAT AN AMBUSH OF WHICH HE IS LEADER—SLINGER—THE OUTRAGE OF THE BRICKEY POOL IS AVENGED—GENERAL WAR—CAPTURE AND PUNISHMENT OF A SPY.

FOR a day or two after this we were rather shamefaced both in school and at home, but such misfortunes as these sit lightly on the spirits of youth, and we soon forgot our own punishment in planning to avenge ourselves upon the perpetrators of the Brickey Pool outrage. The wrong we had sustained was taken up as a common cause by all the boys in our neighbourhood; and at a largely attended meeting, convened to consider how we could best enter upon retaliatory proceedings against the truce-violating warriors of St. Ann's-in-the-Fields, it was arranged that we should first "pay off" Nobby. This

worthy, who had greatly distinguished himself in the many wars between his own and our district, was at this time about fifteen years old. He was not in any constant employment, but we found upon inquiry that he went every morning to a gentleman's house to clean boots and knives and forks, leaving about ten. Acting upon this information, a lot of us lay in wait for him on the Saturday after the affair of the Pool, and, despite a vigorous resistance on his part, gave him a most tremendous hiding.

When coming out of school, on the following Monday afternoon, we were met by a boy out of our street, who informed us that he had heard from a reliable source that Nobby, with a large following, was going to fall upon us coming from school, and would be in ambush near the street at the corner of which our set parted from the last of those whose way home lay in the same direction as ours. Our informant was a warrior of considerable note, and having proceeded so far with his intelligence,

he paused, and, unbuttoning his waistcoat, produced a number of "neddies" (short, stout sticks) that had been concealed round his body, and handing them to us, went on to say that, in the interest of the district, he had taken steps for turning the tables upon Nobby and his gang. He had quietly disposed a strong force of the boys of our district around the entry out of which the St. Ann's side was to rush to the attack, some being stationed below the entry in a disused stableyard, and others above it in an empty house, the key of which had been "sneaked" by a boy whose mother had charge of it. What he wanted us to do was to walk boldly, and with apparent unconcern into the ambush, and stand our ground when the attack was made, so as to draw the enemy clear of the entry, which was of that narrow kind in which "a thousand might well be stopped by three." Being assured that the rescue would come before we could receive any material damage,

we agreed to play the part desired of us, and our friend then hastened away to superintend the final arrangements for the execution of his "strategetic movement."

As we walked home, the rest of us tried all in our power to dissuade Frank Meadows from joining in the encounter.

"You'd better go another way, Franky," said Butcher; "you know you ain't used to this sort of work, and you ain't strong like the rest of us, and no one 'll think you a coward for not coming with us, because you had nothing to do with leathering Nobby."

"I know you mean it for my good, Billy," answered Frank, "but it's no use trying to persuade me; if others didn't think me a coward, I should think myself one; and so if I can't fight, I wont run away." And despite all we could urge, he persisted in his determination.

"Well, if you will come, Frank," said Billy, as we were entering the street in which the enemy were to make their "ugly rush," "you must

keep a sharp look out, I can tell you. And now, steady all," he went on, turning from Frank to the rest of us, "and don't show your 'neddies' till they are right on to us."

Clustering together, and talking loudly of school affairs, we approached the point of ambuscade, and had gone some five or six yards beyond it, when Nobby and his gang rushed out upon us. We let them cross the street before we drew our neddies from under our jackets, as we knew that the first indication of our being armed and prepared for the attack would be sufficient to warn a veteran like their leader that he was betrayed and trapped.

"Get back, lads!" shouted Nobby, instantly comprehending the situation the moment he saw us drawing our sticks; "get back! we'll be surrounded in a minute."

But it was too late, for while he was yet speaking our supports came rushing up, shouting their usual war cry: "War, boys! war, boys: gather to the war, boys!" and the next instant they

charged the invaders on either side, while we charged them in front, though in this charge I had little chance of achieving personal distinction, as in the onset I received a crack over the wrist which made me drop my stick and fall to the rear, howling. By the time I was sufficiently recovered to join the fray again the St. Ann's boys were flying, having cut their way out after a determined fight. Our side was in hot pursuit, and as the boys of the parts of our district through which the invading party had to retreat to reach their own grounds from time to time intercepted their flight, we caught up to them, and skirmishing was renewed, and in this way a running fight was maintained, until Nobby and his followers were driven right into their own district, routed and well thrashed.

Now, in our street there dwelt a most renowned young warrior, called, on account of his skill in the use of the sling, "Slinger." He was at this time between fifteen and sixteen years of age, and picked up a precarious living

for himself as an occasional assistant to the costermongers of the neighbourhood, and a general doer of odd jobs, though he was much oftener to be seen prowling idly about the streets than working, while at war time he devoted himself almost exclusively to warlike pursuits. By us younger boys he was believed to be a most terrific character. It was popularly rumoured amongst us that he had killed a policeman, and some even said two; while the slaying of Goliath was but a common-place feat compared with many of those he was reported to have performed with *his* sling.

"Do you see that fellow just coming in sight?" he would ask, as some approaching foeman became dimly visible in the remote distance; and on his followers replying in the affirmative, he would,—according to the kind of legends current amongst us,—take a round pebble from his pocket, place it in his sling, and as he discharged it say, "Well, watch me bring him down," and the next instant the object of his mark would be

seen to drop as if shot. His skill with his favourite weapon was only equalled by his determination at close fighting, and he was moreover a clever tactician. In short, Slinger was a bold, skilful, and successful general, and happy were the boys who on the breaking out of war obtained his services as leader.

Having heard some rumour to the effect that Billy Butcher and a lot of others had been engaged with an invading party, Slinger came up to the Hollow in the evening to make personal inquiries upon the subject. On learning what had happened he was highly incensed; but having relieved his outraged feelings by a volley of expletives against Nobby's breach of faith, he calmed down from the indignant man to the cool, deliberate general. The treacherous attack upon us, he put it, was a wilful unburying of the hatchet, and a general renewal of hostilities was now imperatively necessary to the honour of our district. Such being the case, he further went on to decide that we should carry

the war into the enemy's territory, by the next evening, making a descent upon the Brickey Pool, and throwing in the clothes of the bathers, of whom, on these summer evenings, there were generally a considerable number to be found. To carry out this movement, Slinger, who this time was accompanied by a staff of young roughs of his own stamp, divided us into knots of four or five, and instructed us to go by various round-about routes to a lane which ran on the off side of the Pool, and in which we would be concealed from the view of the bathers by intervening brick-kilns. When the last division had reached the rendezvous, Slinger massed us, and motioning to us to be silent, led us cautiously along by the kilns till we were within a yard or two of the spot at which we would have to go into the open. Here he paused to take a glance at the enemy's position, which proved to be highly favourable for our design. There were from fifteen to twenty bundles of clothes on the bank, with only three small boys guarding them, and those look-

ing away from us in the direction from which our side usually came when on the war path. "All right, lads," whispered Slinger when he had finished his survey; "in with them, sharp, and then bolt straight away home. Now!" And as he gave the word we rushed from our cover, whooping and flourishing our sticks.

"The warers! the warers!" screamed the watchers the instant we came in sight, and the bathers, with a cry of horror, rushed towards the side. But the warning came too late; before they could reach the edge of the bank we were on top of it, flinging in the clothes, exclaiming as we did so, "You'll remember throwing the Foundry lads' clothes in when there was no war on, wont you!"

The three watchers had escaped, so that we knew that there was no time to lose, and as soon as the last bundle of clothes had been thrown into the water we ran off, and after a few slight skirmishes with hastily assembled parties who

attempted to intercept our retreat, we escaped uninjured and triumphant.

St. Ann's-in-the-Fields was a sort of a small Irish colony, the great bulk of its inhabitants being Irish Roman Catholics. On the other hand, the Foundry district was mostly inhabited by English artisans and labourers, many of whom, though themselves not active members of any religion, were strongly imbued with that unreasoning prejudice against the Catholics which is still (though in a lesser degree than was the case at the time of which I speak) entertained by large numbers of the uneducated and little educated sections of the English working classes. Owing to these circumstances there was a certain amount of sectarian feeling existing between the districts; and in this feeling the schoolboys of both sides, the bulk of whom went respectively to Roman Catholic and Church of England schools, naturally participated. When war broke out, this latent religious antagonism, as might be expected, found expression in the popular form of

doggerel verse; and my first war having now reached the point at which it was to become general, Slinger, as soon as he had obtained reinforcements, struck up the usual sectarian war chant, which ran :—

"Holy water, sleeter slaughter,
Scatter the Catholics every one;
Tear them asunder, make them lie under—
The Protestant boys shall carry the drum!"

And marching to the time of this song we set out to give battle to the foe, who we knew were gathering. The other side used this same catch, merely substituting the word Protestant for Catholic; and as we neared the brick-fields we could hear them also singing. On getting into the fields, the slingers on both sides began firing at long range, but gradually the combatants, who were pretty equally matched, got closer together, and brick-bats and neddies were brought into action, and in this way, sometimes in close quarters and sometimes at long ranges, the fighting was carried on till dusk, when the forces

withdrew, each side claiming the victory, which was decisively with neither of them. The war was now regarded by both sides as fairly established, and for the next three months afforded us a stock evening employment. Whenever we had no special business in hand we would join small passing bands of warriors on their way to the brick-fields, and whatever other pursuit we might be engaged in was, of course, abandoned on those occasions when the cry of "War, boys! war, boys! Gather to the war, boys!" summoned all hands for a general engagement, or called upon all who were within hearing to aid in repelling any sudden incursion of the foe, or to support comrades who were retreating before a superior force of the enemy.

But though our set took a creditable part in this war, the only further noteworthy incident of it in which we were concerned was the capture and punishment of a paroled prisoner, who turned spy and betrayed us into an ambuscade, in which we suffered severely. In time of war territorial

rights were strictly guarded; and a warrior of either side caught within the enemy's lines had either to "give in"—that was, to pledge his word not to fight again during that particular war,—or to be thrashed more or less soundly, according to the number and disposition of his captors. In this respect we had a decided pull over our opponents. The brick-fields were certainly a most desirable playground, but still, when they became dangerous we could manage very well with our own Hollow; while, on the other hand, the St. Ann's boys could not do without coming to the shops in our district, for, of course, a fear of falling into the hands of the "warers" would not be put forward to mothers as an excuse for not going upon household errands. In this way we had deprived the enemy of the services of a number of their fighting men, as when captured singly in this way they generally gave in, and, in the majority of instances, scrupulously fulfilled their pledge to remain neutral. Among others thus made prisoner was a rather

formidable young warrior named Dyke. We came across him as he was carrying a bag of dough to the bakehouse, and having secured him, we asked him in the usual manner whether he would give in or have a good hiding.

He considered for a moment, and then answered, "Well, I have to come here very often, and it's no use always getting into trouble; and so I'll give in, if you'll not hinder me coming of errands."

To this we at once agreed, and set him free, and the next evening we observed that though he looked on while his companions fought, he strictly adhered to his promise of non-intervention. During the next two or three weeks we frequently saw him in the streets of our district, but made no attempt to interfere with him, and, indeed, were rather friendly with him. One evening, as he was returning from a provision-shop, he came to Butcher and some half-dozen others of us, who were in the Hollow, and smilingly observed, "Now, there's a nice chance for you chaps to drop

on some nice apples: there's a few kids on our side at the end of the first kiln roasting a lot they've nailed out of a market-cart."

He said this so pleasantly, and in a manner so expressive of his intention being merely to play off a practical joke upon the apple-stealers, and not to betray his own side, that we had not the slightest idea of treachery, and a few minutes after he had left us we set off with a view to acting upon his hint. We could see three or four little boys busy at the end of the kiln, and having crept to within about twenty yards of them unperceived, we then made a rush and they fled; but the instant we got in a line with the back side of the kiln, out rushed between twenty and thirty of the enemy, who had been concealed behind it, the ambushed party being led by Dyke, whose treachery was thus placed beyond a doubt. We were surrounded, and being greatly outnumbered we were severely mauled before we could fight our way out, all of us being more or less severely injured—my own

wounds consisting of a cut on the head and two fingers cut to the bone.

On learning what had happened, the boys of our neighbourhood were greatly enraged against Dyke; and we now began to keep a strict look-out for him, in the hope of catching him upon some errand. But he now—we supposed—adopted the plan of getting girls and little boys to bring him his errands through our lines, and it was not till two months after we had fallen into his trap that we were able to settle accounts with him. One Saturday morning a boy from a neighbouring street brought us word that Dyke, attended by a body-guard of about a score, had boldly passed through their street on his way to a flour shop. The lads of their street, he informed us, were assembling with a view to intercepting this party on their return, and he had been sent to tell us to muster our forces and join them. On hearing this, Butcher at once despatched four or five boys to other streets, with messages similar to the one that had been just

brought to us, and having collected about a dozen followers, returned with the messenger. By the time Dyke and his party were seen coming back, between forty and fifty of our side were collected at the place of rendezvous, and so we at once advanced to the attack.

"Stick together, lads; we can easily fight through these lot," said the leader of the St. Ann's boys, as we got up to them.

"Well, look here," said Butcher, who was the leader of our party, "all of you, except Dyke, can go past without fighting, if you like; but he's booked, and we mean to have him, if we should all get worse than we mean to give him in taking him."

The answer of the St. Ann's boys to this was to make a rush; but for this we were prepared, and none of them got through. In our turn we made a rush upon them, the bulk of us making for the spot where Dyke stood, pale and trembling. His comrades rallied round him bravely, and for some time kept us all at bay;

but at length Billy Butcher and three or four others managed to lay hold of him, and as we were momentarily being reinforced, his comrades were compelled to abandon him to his fate in order to secure their own retreat.

Instances of paroled prisoners having made use of the immunity which their pledge gave them to betray those who had trusted them were of rare, and their subsequent capture of still rarer occurrence, and I was now for the first time to witness the infliction of the special ordealistic punishment awarded to this class of traitors.

"We're going to ring him," said Butcher to me, when the main body of us returned from chasing the enemy into their own ground.

"Ring him!" I echoed. "Why, what's that?"

"Oh, I thought you knew," said Billy; "but if you don't, it's no use beginning to tell you now, for you'll see't done in a few minutes."

As he was speaking we commenced to march

towards our street, as many as could manage to lay hold of him dragging Dyke along, while the rest of us kept a sharp watch upon him. On reaching the Hollow we formed a large ring by clasping hands, while Butcher and two others, regardless of the prisoner's abject entreaties for mercy, proceeded to blindfold him and tie his hands behind his back. Having thus prepared him for appearing before the tribunal which was to formally condemn him, they led him into the centre of the circle, and holding him firmly by the collar, sang, in their characters of mock counsel for the defence :—

"What has our poor prisoner done?
Poor prisoner done? poor prisoner done?
What has our poor prisoner done?
For you've gained the day!"

The fact that "we'd gained the day" seemed by common consent to be taken as an all-sufficient proof that our prisoner must have been guilty of some heinous crime, and on our singing in reply :—

"Robbed a church and killed a man!
Killed a man! killed a man!
Robbed a church and killed a man!
For we've gained the day!"

his counsel at once tacitly admitted his guilt, making no defence, but merely asking—

"What to our poor prisoner must be done?
Must be done? must be done?
What to our poor prisoner must be done?
For you've gained the day!"

As they sang this last stave, they dragged their "poor prisoner" to the edge of the circle, and we, beginning to move slowly round, and each one suiting the action to the word as we passed the condemned, sang in answer—

"Tread upon his toes, and let him go,
Let him go, let him go;
Tread upon his toes, and let him go;
For we've gained the day!"

This finished the first part of his penance, and he was now unbound and led forty yards in advance, and then permitted to run. Under ordinary circumstances the start allowed him would have enabled him to get clear of us, but

now he was so much crippled by the manner in which his toes had been stamped upon that we speedily overtook him, and, on getting up, began to pelt him vigorously with *mud*, as in dealing with offenders of his class it was an object to make the punishment ignoble as well as severe in character. In this way we chased him, limping and howling, into his own district, and then returned home congratulating each other on having at last been enabled to punish a traitor with all due forms and ceremonies—forms and ceremonies which, after all, were perhaps not more silly and savage in their degree than were those observed in respect to traitors to the State in the good old times.

CHAPTER VII.

THIEVES' LITERATURE—THE FORMATION, PROCEEDINGS, AND IGNOMINIOUS FALL OF THE FEARNOUGHT BAND.

FOR some considerable time past the improvement, enlightenment, elevation, and so forth of "the masses" have monopolised a large share of public attention, and afforded an extensive and ever-open field for the operations alike of speakers, writers, politicians, philanthropists, ladies and gentlemen with "systems" and "views," and professed friends of the people. But though, notwithstanding all that has been said and done by each and all of these classes, it must be confessed that there is still a most undesirable amount of room for enlightenment, &c., among the masses, no unprejudiced person practically acquainted with them and their modes of life and thought will

attempt to deny that a marked improvement in those matters which go to make a cultivated member of society has taken place among them during the last thirty years. This improvement —an improvement which is special as well as part of the general improvement of the age—the professional stump orators, delegates, and other parasitical adventurers who flatter the working-man, and live upon him, of course claim as their sole work; though were such a thing necessary, or this the place to do it in, it would be easy to show that these brawling agitators, who impudently take the credit of every good thing done for the working classes, have really greatly retarded the progress of those classes.

A silent, but nevertheless a powerful and successful means of bringing about the degree of elevation of character that has undoubtedly taken place among the working classes during the last generation has been *Cheap Literature,*—an agency that has benefited the working man more in the course of the last quarter of a cen-

tury than the whole brotherhood of professional agitators ever have done, or ever will do till the end of time. Its influence has borne chiefly on the best section of the working classes, those of them who know that *self-improvement* is the improvement most urgently required among them. To these men it has given that knowledge which is power. It has enabled them to compare the present with past ages, to better understand the abstract and relative condition and relations of their own and other sections of society, to distinguish causes that may retard or assist their advancement, and to see that the class of gentlemen who profess to be every man's friend, and want paying for their professions, are really no man's friend; and it has so far added to the numbers of this section that they are now beginning to have a slightly perceptible counteracting influence upon the action of the many other sections of their general body, who are yet led by the professional "friends of the people."

But while the effects of cheap literature have

been chiefly beneficial, it has, like other good things, its attendant evils; and chiefest among these in the present day is the extensive circulation of the kind of publications classed under the expressive heading of "Thieves' Literature." These works, which are having a most pernicious effect upon boys in the working class rank of life, are published in penny weekly numbers, and at the commencement of their present run,—which set in soon after the abolition of the paper duty,—they were published under such general but suggestive titles as "Black Bess, or the Knight of the Road," and "The Dashing Highwayman." General titles, however, were soon abandoned, and these works now appeal directly to the class whose minds they chiefly corrupt by bearing such titles as "The Boy Brigand," "The Boy Pirate," "The Wild Boys of London," and others of a like character. The sole object of these works is the glorification of all descriptions of vice and criminality. The "boy hero" is invariably represented as a daring

and successful criminal, leading a life of pleasurable excitement, admired and obeyed by men, beloved of women, and eventually settling down with a rich and beautiful wife, and the other rewards generally reserved for the virtuous heroes of ordinary works of fiction. The whole tone of such publications is eminently calculated to turn the spirit of adventure which characterizes English boys to their own destruction, as it teaches them to emulate, not the deeds of great men, but of notorious criminals.

The extent to which these publications circulate can only be fully realized by those inside the working classes; and speaking from an intimate acquaintance with these classes, I can confidently say that eighty per cent. of the boys in this rank of life, between eight and fifteen years of age, who do read, now read works of this class. Cases in which boys are led to commit robberies through the perusal of these publications are occasionally made known through the medium of the police intelligence, but these are a very small propor-

tion of the number of such cases that actually occur, such robberies being, for the most part, from parents, who do not, as a rule, make them public. The depredations of the boys who are thus led into crime are committed either with a view to obtaining money wherewith to purchase the books, or to carry out the lessons taught in them by setting up as "Boy Brigands" or pirates on their own account; and in connexion with this point, it may be noticed that there is one feature in the publication of thieves' literature that *directly* tends to induce the classes who are its principal readers to steal. With a number of one of them the first two numbers of a new work of the same class is often "given away," and these works being written upon the most intense "to-be-continued" principle, the result of this "dodge" is that those who commence to take in one of these works are almost invariably involved into taking several others of the same class, as it would be against the nature of a reader of thieves' literature to rest content with-

out knowing the result of the "terrible encounter" between the Boy King of the Mountains and the Chief of the Black Bandits, at the most exciting part of which the last of the two given away numbers of "The Boy King of the Mountains" had terminated. And thus it often happens that one boy is taking in five or six of these works at the same time; and as the pocket money of working-class boys is too limited in amount to allow of the expenditure of fivepence or sixpence a week in one article, and the teaching of the works which they read is in effect that no boy of the least spirit would for a moment hesitate about committing a robbery, these boys often resort to dishonest means to raise funds for the purchase of their favourite books.

This class of literature, and especially the "Boy Hero" phase of it, has never been so rampant as it is at the present day; but for many years past it has, in slightly varying forms, been but too plentiful and easy of access. There are

few of the working classes who have not, at some period of their school days, come more or less under the baneful influence of this pernicious literature, and I and my school friends were not destined to be among the fortunate exceptions. Before we had any idea of thievedom having a glorifying literature of its own, the stories and traditions respecting notorious pirates, highwaymen, and housebreakers, on which such literature is founded, or to which it gives rise, were current among us. We talked familiarly of the Flying Dutchman and of Captain Kid, and other "rovers of the sea;" had heard of the black flag, the hoisting of which meant "death or glory;" of the Spanish Main and the capture of gold-laden galleons; of plank-walking, and its justification on the plea that dead men tell no tales; of the glorious carouses after a fight, and of the green, sunny island homes, in which blooming, gem-bedecked houries awaited the return of their beloved and picturesque corsairs. Of all these, and many other things of a like nature, we were

constantly hearing, and we believed in the heroic side of them as implicitly as we did in the truthfulness to nature of the gorgeous stage pirates we had seen at the minor melodramatic theatres. It is true that in the nautical dramas we had witnessed virtue and justice as embodied in a terrific combat-fighting British tar, who is constantly shivering his timbers and referring to his lee-scuppers, grappling-irons, figure-head, and so forth, ultimately triumph over the black-hearted pirate; but then, until the very end of the piece the pirate had so much the best of the contest with virtue, and was throughout such a handsome, dashing, dare-devil fellow, that our sympathies were with him rather than with the gallant tar, and poor, but virtuous maiden, who were the nominal hero and heroine of the play. And, instead of teaching us to practice the lessons in virtue, for the inculcation of which, according to the tags at the end of them, they were expressly constructed, these plays merely confirmed our belief to the effect that:—

"Merry is the life of a bold pirate crew!"

Of the popular land thieves, as well as of pirates and sea-robbers, we had also an extensive hearsay knowledge. Dick Turpin, Tom King, Claude Duval, Jack Sheppard, and Sixteen-Stringed Jack, and their exploits, were as familiar in our mouths as household words. We firmly believed the tradition that bonny Black Bess's usual pace was a mile a minute, and knew all the details of the ride to York so well, that when we saw it performed at a circus, we were able to point out to an old gentleman, who had got into conversation with us, and given us biscuits, that the bottles of port wine and the pounds of raw beef-steaks for the bit had been omitted. We knew the history of the first meeting between Dick Turpin and Tom King, and of the latter being accidentally shot to death by his comrade in the course of an encounter with the Bow-street runners. And we were, in a general way, acquainted with the dashing gallantry of the handsome French knight

of the road, and the prison-breakings and other prominent adventures of Jack Sheppard. From this superficial knowledge of the romantic traditions of criminal life we would probably have never come to any practical harm; it was vague, and we would never have attempted to put it into any tangible form, and in course of time our belief in such stories would have duly died out with other exploded beliefs of our childhood. But, unfortunately, just at the period when an implicit and admiring belief in these legends prepared us for an equally confident belief in the possibility of reviving the fallen glories of "The Road and its Riders," or "A Pirate's Life on the Ocean Wave," we became victims to thieves' literature.

When the long winter evenings came on the war was brought to an end, and as the ghost stories which a year or two back had had such a horrible fascination for us, now began to lose their attraction, and we could no longer have the evening readings at old Tom's house, as

Frank's chest became very bad as soon as the cold weather set in, we looked about us for something new, and the "something" unhappily turned up in the shape of trashy criminal romances. Dick Turpin, who was very proud of his nickname, and was avowedly desirous of imitating the great original, took an especial delight in all criminal lore, and editions of Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin in penny weekly numbers beginning about this time to come out, he became a subscriber to them. Previous to this he had cared very little for reading, but he now became very much engrossed in these works, and took in others of the same class as they appeared. The manner in which Dick obtained the money for purchasing these works would not, I fear, have borne very strict examination, as there was little doubt that sundry stray coppers, and small articles easily convertible into coppers, which mysteriously disappeared from his father's house about this time, went to pay his newsagent's account. He was constantly expressing his admi-

ration of the works to the rest of us, and when he had finished reading them lent them to us, and in a short time we became almost as great admirers of them as himself, and began to take in others of a like kind, changing them amongst each other until each of us had read them all. In this way we managed to get through a tolerably extensive range, which was further increased by our set again exchanging with other sets—a means by which, among other books of this delectable kind, we got the "Lives of Pirates and Sea-Robbers," and a cheap volume of the "Newgate Calendar." The perusal of these works soon began to have their, if not desired, at any rate inevitable, effect upon our minds. When not actually reading them, we were talking about them, and our play began to take its bent from their tone.

Thus, if Turpin met one of his companions in the evening, he would greet him with—"Stand and deliver," to which the party addressed would

reply, "What, dog rob dog? Don't you know *me*, Dick?"

Whereupon Dick would give a dramatic start, and extending his hand, exclaim, "What, my bold comrade, Tom King!" and the other, taking his hand, would answer, "He, and none other," and they would then walk away together, humming "Hurrah! hurrah! for the Road."

We also got up two plays, founded on our favourite reading, performing them on the pavement before an empty house, the entrance to the underground kitchen of which came in admirably for stage effect. In the first piece, which was entitled "The Black Flag; or, the Bloodhounds of the Deep," it served admirably for "the pirates' lair" and the "drop" in the plank-walking scene; and in the second piece, which was called "The Masked Rider; or, the Knight of Hounslow Heath," it served equally as well for the robbers' cave. Such amusements as these however soon became too mild for us, and as the desire to realise the rollicking lives and

social and historic fame which fell to the lot of the heroes of our favourite books waxed strong within us, we gradually adopted more decisive measures, until at last, after various hints had been thrown out we fairly broke the ice, and after a long consultation on points of detail, determined to organise ourselves into a disciplined band for the purposes of general depredation by land and sea. We took the title of the Fearnought Band, and were commanded by Butcher, under the title of Captain Fearnought; Turpin retaining his ordinary nickname, and Bryan and I, under the respective titles of Claude Duval and Sixteen-Stringed Jack, acting as his lieutenants, while the rank and file of the band consisted of about a dozen of those who had been in the same set as ourselves during the late war.

We were, of course, to be a secret band, and Butcher, having cut a rude death's head and cross-bones out of an old battledore, the various members were sworn in, the initiatory oath

being to the effect that they would unquestioningly obey every command of the Captain, and leave the division of the spoil to him, never betray the band or any of its members, and aid in pursuing to the death any one who should prove traitor to his comrades. Our next proceeding was to find a cave, and in this we had very little trouble. In the banks of the Hollow were a number of large holes, and by knocking two of these into one, and shaping and enlarging it a bit, and then propping up its roof with planks stolen from a neighbouring building and lining its sides with bricks, we made a really tolerably cave, which we christened "the Fearnought Cavern." A hole in the roof served well enough for a chimney, and a fireplace, with convenience for roasting potatoes, was built of loose bricks. On those nights when we could muster sufficient coal for the fire, and a penny or twopence for table-beer, we would meet in this cave, and, to the best of our abilities, do the pirate horde carousing. Butcher, with a

red nightcap on his head, a large false moustache, which he had manufactured out of horse-hair, pasted on his lip, and wearing a belt, in which were stuck the pistol and dagger that we had bought when playing truant, sat in the post of honour at the far end of the cave; the rest of us, armed with our largest pocket knives by way of daggers, and pistols extemporised by fastening the little brass cannons, used at the celebration of the fifth of November, on to pistol-shaped pieces of wood, sitting round the fire on either side of him. Here, with pieces of cane for cigars, and small beer for the "blood red wine," we read some of our favourite works, sang "Hurrah! Hurrah! for the Road!" "The Rover is free," and other compositions of the same class, talked of the Spanish main,—and baked potatoes in our fire.

But though the carousing business was very pleasant, we knew that life could not be all revelry, even for such fine fellows as we were. We knew that we must work sometimes, and we

soon began to look round for an opportunity for executing some deed of daring that should be worthy of the title we had assumed. One ignoble-minded member of the band suggested that we should effect a forcible entrance into empty houses, and carry off the water cocks, brass door handles, and other saleable fixtures, but this was indignantly scouted by the general body. Another informed us that he knew a boy who got six shillings a week wages, and proposed that we should stop him some Saturday night and rob him of his money. Turpin was at first inclined to entertain this proposition favourably, but Butcher would not listen to it, for it need scarcely be said that we had resolved to go in for the magnanimous line of robber, and only "rob the rich to serve the poor;" and, as our captain pointed out, the proposed plan would be in direct opposition to this principle. All paltry and undignified transactions being voted out of court, we turned our attention to more noble and comprehensive schemes. A

proposal of Turpin's to seize a number of horses and boldly take to the road without further delay or disguise, was so far gone into that we one night formed an expedition to a field about two miles from the town, in which we had been informed horses were turned out to graze. But on arriving there no horses were to be seen, and on making further inquiries, we found that horses were not left out in winter nights, so that this plan had to be abandoned, a matter, however, which we ceased to lament, on finding that stage coaches were unknown in the neighbourhood of Dockington. There was some talk of forcibly seizing a ship, but the general body of us were fain to confess that even such terrible fellows as us would scarcely be able to run away with a ship while her crew was on board. Thus baffled on all sides, we were beginning to arrive at the melancholy conclusion that the age was not worthy of our genius, and that we would be compelled to fall back upon the disgustingly commonplace life of the dull mortals around us,

when our despondency was dispelled by what appeared a certain opportunity for carrying out our freebooting ideas being accidentally thrown in our way.

One Monday morning, as Butcher and I were on the way to school, we were overtaken by Bryan, who in an excited tone proceeded to inform us that on the previous afternoon he had with his father been on board a ship which was for the next fortnight to be in the sole charge of a lame old ship-keeper, whom we might easily overpower. On hearing this, we were convinced that the good time had at length arrived, and at night the joyous information was duly imparted to the band assembled in the cave. The intelligence was of course received with every demonstration of satisfaction, and it was speedily decided that on the following Saturday morning we would seize the ship, and sail for the Spanish main, the only point on which there was any discussion being as to whether we should throw the ship-keeper overboard, or keep him with us

to assist in the navigation of the ship, the latter course being ultimately decided upon. On the Saturday morning we all met in the cave, and having bought two pennyworth of powder, loaded our firearms, using tiny pebbles and buttons instead of bullets, which we were unable to procure from want of funds, and with our pistols and knives carefully concealed under our jackets, set off on our cutting-out expedition. In about an hour we reached the point at which, according to Bryan's statement, the ship was lying, but behold no such craft was to be seen, Mickey having either been mistaken in taking the bearings, or the ship shifted. This hitch at the very outset of our undertaking struck us ominously, and the forebodings of failure which it excited in our minds proved prophetic; for after prowling about the docks and basins for four or five hours without finding the object of our search, we were chased away by a Dock policeman, whose suspicions our movements had aroused. We returned home, feeling very chop-

fallen, and some of us, I fancy, secretly ashamed also, and for some days afterwards the Fearnought Band was allowed to languish, and would probably soon have died a natural death had not an incident occurred which in the first place revived our hopes, but ultimately brought the existence of our band to an abrupt conclusion.

One of the band made the discovery that the district water-rate collector had each evening to come across a rather lengthy stretch of waste ground, carrying with him a small black bag in which, as we supposed, the taxes gathered during the day were contained. Now, as according to the teachings of thieves' literature, it was a specially glorious and commendable thing to rob—and if necessary murder—any Government official, and above all a tax-collector, we resolved to waylay this gentleman, and make him stand and deliver. But alas! nothing seemed to prosper with the Fearnought Band; for the father of one of the band, happening to discover what was in the wind, sent word to the school, where a "searching

investigation" was instituted, the result being that we—the leaders of the terrible Fearnought Band—were first derided, and then ignominiously caned, amid "roars of laughter" from the general body of our schoolmates.

We were terribly cut up over this inglorious termination to our adventures; but on looking back at these events, I am afraid the whole course of our proceeding was of pretty much the same inglorious character; for though we planned piracy and highway robbery upon a grand scale, our actual thefts were of a petty and ignoble kind, being chiefly confined to small quantities of coals and potatoes. We would follow behind a coal cart till we got a chance of snatching a "cob" off it, and then decamp; and our roasting potatoes were obtained by "snacking" from market carts and baskets outside of shop doors. Once, indeed, when on a foraging raid, we did soar a little higher than this, by stealing a waggoner's dinner. The main body of us pelted him with clay pellets until he gave chase, and

then Turpin climbed into the waggon, and took a large meat and potato pie out of the locker. We ate the pie amid much self-glorification upon our skill and daring in obtaining it; but after all, the stealing of it was but a poor affair to cite as the greatest achievement of a body so ambitiously organized as the Fearnought Band.

Even after the caning Turpin would have kept the band together, but the rest of us had had more than enough of it, as we found it all disappointment and cuffs and no halfpence, and so the band was dissolved, though even then we retained the idea that it was the time and not us that was out of joint. Nipped in the bud, our attempts to become criminals were of course only laughable, but had they not been discovered in time they would probably have resulted—as many similar cases do in the present day—in some of us disgracing ourselves and parents; and I now never see a boy reading thieves' literature without thinking what a pity it is that

there was no one to do for the dashing highwayman school of thieves what Dickens has done for the Fagins and Bill Sykeses of the present day.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUR SET IS BROKEN UP—RUNNING AWAY TO SEA—A LETTER FROM MICKEY BRYAN—THE DEATH OF FRANK MEADOWS.

IN the little world of the school-house, as in the larger world of which it forms a stage, "we meet to part again." The breaking up of the associations formed there is as inevitable as the progress of time—more inevitable even than the sundering of family and other ties brought about by the chances and changes incidental to the later stages of the battle of life; and each half year it comes as a thing of course that some boy of a set passes away from the school and his place among his schoolmates knows him no more. The parting of schoolmates makes but little impression upon their minds at the time. Those who are left behind may feel the loss of their companion for

a few days if he has been a favourite among them, but play and new friends soon banish their regretful thoughts, while, among the working classes at least, the boy who has just left school is but too anxious to forget and be forgotten by his schoolmates. He goes straight from the school to the workshop, where he finds himself among boys who are doing all they know to "come the man," and consider it a first essential to that proceeding to cut schoolboys, so that a boy on entering a workshop generally fights shy of his old companions lest his new ones should fight shy of him.

But though the severing of school friendships is lightly regarded at the time, there are, I think, no *general* memories so long cherished and fondly looked back to as those connected with our school friendships. If in manhood you meet some old schoolmate whom you have not seen for years, you talk less of current topics, or of what may have happened to yourselves since last you met, than of the mutual friends of your

school days. You ask your friend what has become of Jones—"Step-and-fetch-it" as we used to call him, you know—or tell him what you know about Brown, or you mutually "wonder" what has become of little Billy Smith, or express your surprise that Williams, whom we all thought such a muff, should have succeeded so well in life, while Edwards, who in the old days had taken the lead of us all, should not have succeeded at all.

And now as I come to write of the breaking up of my own school associations I think of these things, and the old memories and old faces rise before me, bringing with them a sense of the difference between *now* and *then*, powerfully illustrative of the too-seldom realized truism that the world is indeed growing old for us all. To the long look back of memory it seems but the other day since my child-sweetheart—pretty, rosy, coquettish Nelly Gibson—and I went to school hand-in-hand together, and yet it was but the other day of actual time that I met her, for

the first time since our school days, a stout blooming matron, with a daughter—and that one not her eldest—"the living picture" of the pretty little Nelly over whom Turpin and I fought. And so it is in respect to my male companions. Those of them who are living are scattered about the country earning their livelihood as units of "the millions," but it is as they lived and looked in our school days that they still exist for me.

The dissolution of our set commenced shortly after the Fearnought Band had been brought to an untimely end, and indeed Turk, who after his fight with Butcher was in a great measure of our set, had finally left the school some time before. Going to one of the half-yearly race meetings that took place in Dockington, he was smitten with an ambition to become a jockey, and being given to act upon his impulses, he forthwith engaged himself to a trainer, and his parents sanctioning the transaction, he met us coming out of school on the following day to bid

us good-bye, and at the end of the race meeting he left the town with his new master. For two or three years after we generally saw him at each race meeting. On the occasion of his first return he came down to the Hollow to see us, and after our first greetings were over, and he had given us a little general information upon such points as that he could lick any lad in the stable his own size, he pulled a large spur from his pocket, and informed us that that was what he was going to ride with in the Cup Race. But though upon the strength of his assurance a number of us played truant and went to the races on the Cup day, specially to see him ride, we were doomed to disappointment. We saw him walking about in the paddock, clad in a stable dress, smoking the stump of a cigar, and looking exceedingly knowing; and on calling him he came to the railings to us, and gave us a lengthy explanation, plentifully larded with technical phrases, of the reasons of his not having "the mount," winding up by giving us

a "tip" for the race. But as we had only threehalfpence among us, and there was no means of "getting on" for so small an amount as that, the tip, which did not turn out to be the "straight" one, did us no injury. Turk probably romanced a little upon this and many subsequent occasions, as though he was constantly talking about his mounts, he never got one. His ambitious hopes of being a jockey were not destined to be realized; he soon began to get too heavy, and when his time was up as a stable-boy he cut that part of the profession and took to "following the horses" in the capacity of "bookmaker," a profession in which, I have been informed, he achieved considerable success.

Turpin, as was incidentally mentioned in the last chapter, would have kept the Fearnought Band together, even after the caning episode, but finding the general opinion decidedly against him, he gave up the point, and in a few days was apparently as thoroughly reconciled to our return to commonplace life as the rest of us,

but, as events proved, it was only in appearance that he was thus resigned. The spirit of romantic adventure was too deeply implanted in his character to be eradicated by what had occurred, and he had not given up his dreams, but merely kept them to himself on finding our sympathies falling away from him. One Monday, about two months after the break up of our band, he was not at school, and did not come home at the usual hour, and in the evening his mother came to our house to ask if I knew anything about him. Knowing from her inquiries that he must have been playing truant, I gave some vague answer in order to avoid betraying him; but on her coming again crying, and in a very excited state after I was in bed, I confessed that he had not been at school. Although she had strongly suspected this, the assurance of it increased her alarm. She went back to her house, and looking into Dick's little box, found that his clothes were gone, and then she knew that he had carried out his oft-hinted-at intention of running

away to sea. Late as it was, his father hurried down to the Docks to make inquiries, but returned after midnight without having heard anything of him, and all private inquiries, and those instituted during the week by the police were equally fruitless. His parents were of course in the greatest grief and anxiety about his disappearance, and their neighbours evinced a warm sympathy with them in their trouble, and did all in their power to aid in the search, while among the boys of the school it need scarcely be said, Turpin's running away was an absorbing topic of discourse, Butcher, Bryan, and I being regarded as heroes, simply upon the strength of being his most intimate friends. The general opinion was that he had run away to sea, though there were a few melodramatically disposed youths who were inclined to believe that he was stolen by gipsies, or had joined a band of robbers; and one or two gloomy-minded characters even suggested that he might have been murdered. On the tenth day of his absence,

however, all doubts as to his proceedings were cleared up. A letter from him—badly spelled, heavily scrawled, and tear blotted—dated from a distant seaport, reached his parents, asking their forgiveness for the pain he knew he must have caused them, and stating that having made up his mind to go to sea, and knowing that they were opposed to it, and would find him out if he tried to ship from Dockington, he had walked to the port from which he was writing, and would sail from there that day on board the collier *Sarah* bound for London. This letter greatly relieved his parents' minds; and his father having ascertained when the *Sarah* would reach London, went up there, and brought Dick back with him, having first promised him that if he still wished to go to sea, he should do so in a proper manner as soon as they could get him a good ship and provide his outfit. He was received on his return in the true prodigal son style. His mother fell upon his neck and wept for joy, and though she had no fatted calf to

kill, she insisted upon petting him and—as Dick afterwards put it—"caudling him up," in order to counteract the effects of the hard living he had been subjected to while away from home. We boys naturally lionized our enterprising companion, and were quite proud to have him amongst us again, and eager and delighted to hear the story of his adventures.

On going to bed on Sunday night he had tied his Sunday suit, together with a loaf and half a pound of cheese that he had "snacked" out of the cupboard, into a bundle. This bundle he, in the course of the night, took downstairs and secreted in a cupboard near the door, and while his mother was doing something in the bedrooms on the Monday morning he took out the bundle, and calling upstairs, "I'm going, mother; good-bye," went out, his mother not noticing the significance of the words, and the tremulous tones in which they were spoken, until he was missed. Having learned his route when arranging his plans, he was enabled to make straight

away; and when about eight miles on the road, he came up with three Irishmen, with whom he travelled for the rest of the day, completing a journey of thirty-five miles by nightfall, when they got into a barn for their sleeping quarters. Dick had offered to share his loaf and cheese with his companions, but on learning where he was bound for, they told him that he would require all his provisions for himself, and not only declined his offer, but gave him share of their own scanty meals; and as their ways lay in different directions on the second day, and they were going to start earlier than Dick, who was terribly weary and footsore, they gave him part of their breakfast and a penny each, and wishing him joy went on their way. On that and the following day Dick was again tramping, living, meanwhile, on his provisions and the coppers given him by the warm-hearted Irishmen, of whom he always spoke in terms of the liveliest gratitude. He reached the seaport which he had marked as his destination after dark, and

that night slept under some sacks in a cart. The next day he wandered about the docks and wharfs, trying, but without success, to hear of a ship, and feeling very tired and hungry as night came on, and having no other resource, he sold the jacket and waistcoat of his Sunday suit to obtain the means of getting food and lodgings. He had asked for, and hoped to have got, five shillings for his clothes, but the dealer would only give half-a-crown, and eightpence of that was immediately spent in a hearty meal. Having satisfied his hunger, he went to a twopenny lodging-house for a bed; but, on finding himself put in a room with about a score of professional tramps and beggars of both sexes, and from eight to eighty years of age, he was too terrified to sleep, and rose early in the morning and took his departure, minus his bundle, which had been stolen by some of his room-fellows. For the next two or three days he continued to haunt the docks in a vain search for a berth as cabin-boy, and was at last wandering about, weary,

hungry, and penniless, when the captain of the collier, more from motives of pity than any real want of a boy, took him for the run, and, suspecting his position, advised him to write to his parents. Such was Turpin's story in substance, though he, of course, told it more in detail; and when he had got over the effects of his travel, he dwelt mostly on the humorous side of his adventures, repeating to us the stories with which the Irishmen had lightened the road, and relating some of the more comic incidents he had witnessed in the lodging-house and on board the collier.

In a few days Dick was quite well again, and as he still expressed himself desirous of going to sea, his father began to look out for a ship for him, he meanwhile agreeing to go to school again until such time as arrangements could be made for sending him to sea in a legitimate manner. On learning that he was coming back among them, his schoolmates resolved to give him a "reception," and when he entered the

playground on the morning of his return there arose such a cheer as was never heard within it, save on the breaking up for the holidays. His classmates flocked round him, eager to shake his hand, and presently there arose a cry of "shoulder him! shoulder him!" and the next instant he was being borne round the ground on the shoulders of two of the biggest of the boys, the others following in a body singing a readily-extemporized paraphrase of "We wont go home till morning," which ran—

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah,
Dick Turpin's come back to-day.
We wont go home till morning,
We wont go home till morning,
We wont go home till morning,
Dick Turpin's come back to-day;"

each repetition of the verse being followed up with "three cheers for Dick Turpin;" the proceedings being finally concluded with a rattling three times three and another attack of hand-shaking.

At the end of six weeks, Turpin was appren-

ticed to a Dockington firm of ship-owners, and appointed to a ship which was to start on an eighteen months' voyage, a fortnight later. During his last fortnight at school he came clad in one of his new sailor's suits, and swaggered about among us admiring creatures in grand style. On the Friday afternoon, Mr. Mayfield took him on to the platform, and with a few kind remarks presented him with a very nice Church Service, the boys assisting in the ceremony of presentation by giving a ringing cheer. When he got outside he had to go through a tremendous amount of hand-shaking and good-byeing, in the midst of which he broke down and sobbed as though his heart would burst, and tears being contagious under such circumstances, a number of his friends also set to crying, and could hardly sob out their "Good-bye, Dick, old fellow!" but in a few minutes all hands plucked up heart of grace again, and drying their eyes, finally parted with a cheer. Butcher and I had to assist Dick in carrying home the books, boxes of paints, fifes,

pocket-knives, and other keepsakes with which he was loaded; but I fancy that nothing less than a floating zoological garden would have enabled him to have executed all the commissions for bringing home—monkeys, parrots, Newfoundland dogs, and other animals with which he was entrusted.

By the time he came back from his first voyage, all nonsense about picturesque pirates was thoroughly taken out of him, and he had discovered that there were many hardships incidental to a sea-going life; still, upon the whole, he liked the profession of his choice, and expressed his determination to persevere in it. And he carried out his intention to good purpose, for a few years since I met him in London, holding the position of chief mate of a large vessel belonging to a firm in whose service he had been from the time he had finished his apprenticeship, and under whom he had good hopes of rising still higher, for he had added diligent study to his practical experience, and was a competent navigator, and

stood well with his employers in other respects. He took me to his neat little home in the neighbourhood of Dock London, and showed me the Church Service given him by Mr. Mayfield, and a number of other keepsakes given him by his schoolmates, and among them the copy of "Robinson Crusoe" that had been my parting gift, preserved with affectionate care. Having looked at these, we grog'd and toasted the old set, and sat together far into the night, unconscious of the flight of time as we talked of the old friends and times.

Shortly after Turpin went to sea, Bryan's father obtained a better situation in a small country town about seventy miles from Dockington, and Mickey had of course to go with the rest of the family. He left on a Monday, and Butcher and I were privileged to stay from school to go and see him off, and on parting he promised faithfully to write to me that day four weeks. On the morning when by this arrangement the letter was due, I was eagerly on the look-out

for the postman, for I had never before had the honour of receiving a letter, and was in a high state of expectancy about it—more, I must confess, in respect to the importance likely to accrue to myself from the receipt of a *real* letter, than from any special anxiety about my friend's welfare. I saw the postman pass the window, and had the door open before he could knock.

"Master Robinson," he called out.

"Yes! yes! it's here, it's me, I'm Master Robinson," I spluttered out, hastily extending my hand for the letter.

"Here you are then," he said, smiling at my eagerness as he handed me the letter, and the next instant I was minutely examining its outward appearance, and telling my mother that it was a right one. Having satisfied myself on this point, I opened it and read the following long epistle:—

"Dear Johnny,—According to promise I take up my pen to write you these few lines, hoping

you are all well, as it leaves us at present, thank God for it. This is a rum little place, it ain't no bigger than about three streets in Dockington, and the people talk so queer, they say how bin'ee for how are you, and I anna for I ain't. But instead of being ashamed of talking this way, I'm blessed if some of the lads didn't get on to me about the way I talked, calling me Towney and Cockney, and so one day when they were on with their gammon, I says, 'Well, Towney or not Towney, I'm blowed if there's any of you his own size can take it out of him.' 'I don't know so much about that,' says the leader of them, and so I offs with my jacket and let him have one, and he didn't hit me back, so that he as good as give me the best, and none of them didn't get on with me again. I had such a lark the third day after I came here. A woman as came into our house says to me you should take a turn down by the river, and she told me how to go, and so I went, but blessed if I could find anything but a long pit as I thought, and so I

goes back and told her I couldn't find the river, but when I showed her which way I'd been she told me that that was the river; but only think, it ain't half as wide across as the Brickey Pool, and in some parts I can walk over it only up to my knees, and there ain't no docks nor ships, nor anything about it, only a few little boats, cos why, you know, it ain't big enough for a ship to sail in. Last week my father took me to see a castle, a proper castle, like you see in pictures and read about in books. I went in the dungeon and I saw the gratings at the top of the ceiling of the dungeon, which they used to feed the prisoners through. All the rooms of the castle are like the solid ground, with grass growing in them. I went on the top of the tower of the castle, which is very high. The steps up to it go round and round, so that when you get to the top you can see right down them like a well. There was a big spy-glass on the tower, and I paid a penny and had a look through, and could see above twenty miles off. I saw

the great big dripping pan they used to roast whole oxes in, and the large spoon and ladle and the horns of some of the oxes that had been roasted, and I think that's all I saw. But what do you think, Johnny, we've got a house with a garden, and there's two trees with real apples growing on them in it, and lots of gooseberry bushes and currant bushes, and I dig in it with a spade, and I'm going to keep rabbits, and father says when the apples are ripe I'm to send a hamper for you and Billy, and wont that be stunnen? I go to a school something like the old one, but there's only about eighty lads at it, and I'm in the second class, and I've made pals with some of them, and they're a pretty tidy sort when you know them. My mother sends her love to your mother, and she says as you're to tell her as she likes our new house very well, only there ain't no oven in it, and that makes it awkward, as you can do many a little thing with a oven as you can't without, and it comes expensive if you have to send every little dish to the

bake-house, and there ain't no soft water laid on to the houses here like there is in Dockington, and that's a great loss when you've a big wash, but we catch a good drop when it rains. Give my love to Frank and Billy and the rest of the chaps, not forgetting yourself.

"From your affectionate friend,

"MICHAEL BRYAN.

"P.S.—Johnny, can you tell this :—

"Y Y U R,
Y Y U B,
I C U R
Y Y for me.

"If you give it up, the answer is :—

"To wise you are,
To wise you be,
I see you are
Too wise for me.

"If you or Billy know any riddles send me some good ones, as they are all the go here, and I want to give them some regular hard ones as they'll be forced to give up.

"P.S. again.—You tell the other chaps all about

me, cos you see I have to pay for the stamps out of my own money, and I can't afford to be writing to many. Be sure and write soon, and don't forget the riddles."

I was exceedingly proud of this letter, which, with its envelope with "the *real* stamp and postmarks," I showed about among my friends until they were worn to pieces, and having by the following Saturday collected an assortment of the most difficult puzzles obtainable among our acquaintances, Butcher and I wrote Mickey a sort of consultation answer, expressing our delight at his epistle, and giving him all the news as to what had happened at school since he had left. In this way Bryan and I kept up a correspondence for about six months, and then, as often happens with older people, it fell through, and I lost sight of him until, years afterwards, we chanced to meet in a workshop, and with mutual pleasure became "mates" as we had been schoolfellows.

Shortly after I ceased to write to Bryan, Butcher

left school, and was apprenticed to the engineering firm in which our fathers worked; but as he knew that I also was in due time to be bound to "the trade," he did not cut me as decisively as otherwise he might have done, and as he did the rest of the schoolboys, with the exception of Frank Meadows. He still allowed me to be seen with him occasionally, and sometimes when he had been working over-time he would treat me to the gallery of the theatre on Saturday night, and introduce me to his companions, who, on the strength of his introduction and the knowledge that my father worked in the same establishment with them, very kindly patronized me, while I regarded them with a spirit of hero-worship, and began to be very impatient for the time when I should be able to go to work and become one of them. In emulation of these young gentlemen, I began to smoke short pipes and steal my father's tobacco—misdeeds which, however, soon brought their own punishment, as the pipe frequently brought on a deadly sickness,

and my predatory visits to my father's tobacco-jar being discovered, I got a severe "quilting."

While my other companions were thus going out in the world, Frank Meadows—the one who had most endeared himself to us all—was slowly but surely passing away to the better land. Although too ill to venture out at night, and often in great pain, he continued to attend school more or less regularly, as he was very anxious to carry off the first prize in his class at the forthcoming examination; and even by those who were going to contest it with him it was allowed that his being able to do so merely resolved itself into a question of his being able to stick to his work.

"I shall have all the holidays to rest myself," was his constant reply to those who urged him to stay at home; and so, despite his constantly increasing weakness, he persevered to the end, and triumphed. On the day of the examination he looked better than he had done for months, and the hearty cheers with which he was greeted as

he walked to the platform to receive his prize, seemed to give him new strength, for he returned to his place with a light step and a joyous expression upon his countenance, such as had not been seen on it for many a day before. But this was merely the temporary strength that comes of excitement, and the re-action came quickly. The next day he was in a high fever, and though by prompt medical attention the fever was speedily subdued, it left him utterly prostrate, and when the holidays terminated he was still unable to leave his bed. He was much disappointed at this, as he had been promoted to the first class, and wished to take his place in it.

"But never mind, Johnny," he would say, smiling feebly, when speaking of his regret upon this point, "I must pitch into it when I get better, that's all." At this stage of his illness it never occurred to him that he would *not* get better.

"I'm only weak now, and I'll soon get over that," he would say in reply to my inquiries as to

how he felt; and as the spring advanced he did get a little better, and was able to get out of bed for a few hours in the day; and one sunny Saturday, towards the end of March, when a lot of us were playing in the Hollow, we were pleasantly surprised to see him coming towards us, leaning on the arm of his uncle. As they approached us, the painful effect of his illness became startlingly apparent; he looked a perfect skeleton, trembled from weakness as he walked, and was ghastly pale.

"Here we are, Johnny," said old Tom, when they got up to us, "we're like a bad shilling, always turning up again. We didn't tell you about it last night as we wanted to give you a surprise."

They walked about among us for a quarter of an hour, and then, Frank feeling tired, they returned home. On the next afternoon he was able to come out again for half an hour, but on the Monday he was worse, and in the course of a paroxysm of coughing burst a blood-vessel, and

was for some days afterwards in a very precarious condition. The first time I was admitted to see him after this, I could see, young as I was, that the hand of death was upon him, and I found that the knowledge of it was now also beginning to dawn upon his own mind, for when I was going away he took my hand in his, and gazing earnestly into my face, asked, interrogatingly,

"You don't think I'm going to die, Johnny, do you?"

"O no, Franky," I answered, speaking as cheerily as I could; "you'll get better in the warm weather."

But I fear my looks must have belied my words, for he received my reply with a sigh and a mournful shake of the head.

During all his illness old Tom and his wife were as kind about him as it was possible for them to be, Tom, in particular, attending him with a woman-like tenderness that few would have given him credit for. He had conceived a very strong, and, in some respects, a very strange

affection for Frank, whose illness, now that it had assumed such alarming symptoms, threw him into the greatest grief and anxiety. He could not settle to his work, and could scarcely either eat or sleep, and sometimes when he came from the sick room he would fairly break down, and covering his face with his hands, moan, "O Franky! Franky! my good little Franky, and must I lose you?" and he would follow the doctor to the door, and in an imploring tone ask such questions as, "Don't you think there's a chance for him, doctor?" or, "Haven't you known people as bad as him to pull through?" with a view to extracting some word of hope.

But the medical man only answered him with the stock commonplaces about there being hope while there was life—that all that science could do had been and should be done—and much more in the same style, all of which was as vague and meaningless to Tom as even a doctor could desire.

"I ain't a scholard, you see, Johnny," he would

say to me if I happened to be there at the time of the doctor's visit, "and I can't make him out proper, but he don't say there *ain't* a chance for him, and people that have been as bad as Franky have got round." And as he spoke he would look to me for some word of comfort, and I would reply, "O yes, I've heard of people getting better that the doctors *had* given up."

I generally called to see Frank each evening and stayed with him for an hour or two, telling him of what had been going on in school and reading to him. The scripture readers, district visitors, town missionaries, and other agents of religious bodies who are constantly going about in the poorer parts of large towns, knowing that there was a sick person in the tinman's house, were indefatigable in leaving tracts, but as they (the tracts) were of the usual dull, brimstone-breathing, text-ladened type, and, moreover, gave very conflicting answers to the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" they terrified Frank and unsettled his mind, and he soon ceased to

read them, preferring a chapter from his Bible or the "Pilgrim's Progress." Although the great change was surely approaching, his condition varied slightly from day to day, and with the changes in his physical state his moods of mind were alternately hopeful or sad. He was a loving, patient, meek-spirited boy, but he had not attained that terrific state of goodness occasionally attributed to children in religious literature, and frequently professed by gentlemen about to be hanged; a state in which the model child or rapidly religionized murderer express themselves desirous of nothing so much as death, in order that they may escape from this wicked world and at once become angels. For him death had its terrors, and the world—chequered though his brief course in it had been—its attractions. He was weakly human, and the idea of death presented itself to him associated with its material horrors as well as the bright hereafter beyond, and he feared to

"Lie in cold obstruction and to rot,"

and loathed the image of the cold dark grave. With a mind thus constituted, he was very sorrowful and low-spirited at those times when the acuter phases of his disease impressed him with the idea that he would not recover, while when freed from pain and only suffering from debility, he would become hopeful again, and speak of pulling up for back time when he got to school again, or what he would do when he was a man, and it was not till a week before his death that he fully realized the idea that he would not get better.

On going into his room one evening, I found old Tom—who had been sitting up with him the greater portion of the two previous nights—asleep in a chair, and Frank silently weeping.

"O, Johnny, Johnny!" he whispered, in a scared tone, as I approached the bed, "I'm going to die."

"O, don't say that, Franky," I said, taking his hand, "you'll be getting better after a bit."

"No! there's no hope for me now, Johnny,"

he whispered, in the same scared broken tone. "I heard the doctor speaking to uncle in the passage, and I can tell, from what he said—" and then, covering his face with the bed clothes, he passionately sobbed, "O, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny! I did so want to live."

During the next two or three days he cried a good deal, but after that became resigned, and spoke calmly, though still with a touch of regret, of his approaching end.

"I should like to have lived to have been a man, Johnny," he said, "but perhaps it's better as it is, for you see I should never have been strong like the rest of you, and perhaps wouldn't be able to earn a living for myself."

He thought of the world beyond the grave too, and had a childish, hopeful reliance as to the brightness of his hereafter. One evening he had, as I supposed, fallen asleep with my hand in his, and, fearing to wake him, I made no attempt to withdraw my hand. But at the end of about half an hour he opened his eyes, and, gazing earnestly

into my face, said, "I haven't been sleeping, Johnny, I've been thinking about Heaven."

"Have you, Franky?" I said.

"Yes," he answered, "and I think I shall go there. I'm only a poor weak little fellow, and I try to be good, and I don't think the Lord would send me into the bad place."

And in this spirit of meek reliance upon the mercy of the Great Supreme he remained to the end.

As often happens in these long illnesses, death came suddenly at last. About eleven o'clock in the day succeeding the evening on which Frank had spoken of his hopes of heaven, the tinman's youngest son came to the school, to tell me that Frank was dying, and had asked to see me. I hastened back with him, and, on entering the sick chamber, saw old Tom supporting his dying nephew's head, while Tom's wife and the doctor stood by the bedside, wiping the blood-streaked froth from his lips. On seeing me, he made a feeble motion for me to place my hand in his, and then gaspingly whispered:—

"I'm dying now, Johnny, good-bye for ever!"

He paused for some time, and then suddenly tightening his grasp on my hand, he exclaimed, in a quicker, stronger tone, "Johnny, Johnny! I can't see you any longer, kiss me, kiss me!" As I stooped to kiss him, he heard me sobbing, and whispered "Don't cry, Johnny," and then, as his lips touched my cheek, he said "be a good boy and a good man, Johnny, and then I'll see you again."

After this he lay still for a few minutes, and then, suddenly raising himself, he seized old Tom's hand, and exclaiming "Uncle, God ble——," fell back dead.

At the tinman's request, I attended Frank's funeral, and the bitterest tears of that period of my life were those I shed as I saw his coffin lowered into the grave, though the sorrow of the weepers was as nothing to old Tom's tearless grief.

Years afterwards I stood by Frank's grave again at a time when, in addition to his remains, it also held all that was mortal of old Tom the

tinman; and I ventured to hope then, as I do now, that when he came to be weighed in the balance, his Christian love and kindness to his orphaned nephew, and the real goodness of heart that underlaid his rough exterior and rude mode of life, would outweigh his misdeeds.

CHAPTER IX.

A READING SET—EXAMINATION DAY—CONCLUSION.

AS, one after another, the leaders of our set passed away, I might have assumed the leadership of those younger boys who had joined it at a later period than myself, but fortunately for me it so fell out that I became a junior member of another and—so far as my educational progress was concerned—better set. At the Midsummer examination following Frank Meadows's death I was advanced to the first class—the class in which was to be found the hard-reading set of the school. The boys of this set, about a dozen in number, were not hard readers in the sense in which that phrase is applied to university men, but simply "constant"

and admiring readers of those higher works of fiction that more especially commend themselves to boys; and considering their position in life, and that good books were at that time very much dearer than they are at present, their collection of standard works was wonderfully extensive. Among them they had most of the works of Scott, Cooper, and Marryat, a number of such then popular books as "The Castle of Otranto," "Saint Clair of the Isles," and "The Children of the Abbey;" together with some good volumes of travel and adventure, and, it need scarcely be said, "Robinson Crusoe" and "The Pilgrim's Progress." When I had been at the Borough school about a year, I began to help my father with his piece-work books, and as I improved in my writing and arithmetic, I gradually took sole charge of them, and as a reward for the assistance I was thus able to give him, he occasionally presented me with some interesting book, and his friend the cashier, who had taken a liking to me, sometimes gave me similar presents. In this

way I had, by the time I entered the first class, gathered a pretty good little library, including, among other books, "Tales of the Wars," and "Tales of the Borders" (which my father had taken out in numbers and had bound); "Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea;" "The Arabian Nights," "Gil Blas," and "Don Quixote." With this collection I was a welcome addition to the ranks of the reading set, who in a general way lent freely to each other, the only exception to their rule of communism in books being a juvenile Mudie, who had an extensive assortment of works which he would only let out at a farthing per week per volume, though, as he was a regular frequenter of the second-hand book-stalls, and spent all the money he got from his subscribers in adding to his stock, his proceedings added to the general good.

Among these boys my habits soon began to change: I lost all relish for roaming about the streets in my leisure time, and now found my chiefest pleasure in reading. In the summer

months I would often be awake and reading by four o'clock in the morning, and after school I would again be found reading on into the late twilight; while in the winter months I would frequently smuggle candles and matches to my bed-room and eagerly continue the perusal of the fortunes of the "Fair Maid of Perth," or the enthralling adventures of "Hawk Eye," or "Midshipman Easy," long after my parents were asleep, and more wonderful than all in my mother's estimation, I sometimes even neglected my meals for my books.

A few months of this hard reading took me through the bulk of the books obtainable among my class-mates, and then, like a number of others similar situated, I became a "constant subscriber" to the "London Journal" and the few other penny serials published at that time. In these journals there was, as now, always two or three tales running, and as these stories were very full of plot, and each weekly instalment broke off at some specially interesting point, we were kept in a

chronic state of suspense respecting them, and had a never-failing source of conversation in trying to make forecasts of their *denouements*.

What I might have thought of these tales had I read them at a more mature period of my life, or whether I would then have read them at all, I cannot say, but the impression left upon my mind with regard to those of them that I did read during the period of my boyhood in which I was a subscriber to penny periodical literature, is that they were of a very interesting character, and I still retain a vivid remembrance of the really clever plots of some of them. There was certainly much exaggerated sentiment and improbable incident in them, but their moral tone was of the highest order. And if the unities were outraged by all the good people being represented as possessing an amount of virtue unattainable by mortals here below, and all the bad ones as

> "Monsters of such hideous mien,
> That to be hated needs but to be seen"—

the want of unity was amply atoned for by the additional dramatic effect with which it enabled

the writers of the tales to enforce the truth of the sentiment—a sentiment which they all sought to inculcate upon the minds of their readers—that in all transactions of life, and in the most comprehensive sense of the term, "honesty is the best policy."

At the conclusion of these tales there were no half measures in the distribution of rewards and punishments. The right men and the right women were *always* fitted into the right places at last, and truth and honesty were *invariably* rewarded with a lavish liberality which rarely occurs in real life, where virtue is generally allowed to be its own reward. Indeed, I have met with cynical worldlings who assert that such things as truth and honesty exist only in name, or if they ever had a more substantial being have entirely gone out of fashion in this present age of "Bubble" companies and "Gigantic" frauds. They will tell you in effect that—

> "'Tis said, but 'tis most true—that Honesty
> Is like the phantom sprites in grandma's tales—
> Much oftener prated of than seen."

But in the tales of which I am speaking, virtue not only existed, but was, as I have said, richly rewarded; while vice was deservedly punished. "Our high-souled hero" always married "our lovely and accomplished heroine," and inherited or otherwise acquired a magnificent fortune, and the other virtuous characters were each rewarded in their degree; while Nemesis effectually, but with a due regard to the comparative enormity of their villany, settled the business of the bad characters. The horse of the "titled villain" would leap with him into the "dark abyss," the old poisoner would drink the "deadly potion" he had prepared for an intended victim, and the minor villains would in some equally appropriate manner be brought to grief.

In making these remarks, it must be understood that I am alluding to a time when penny literature was, comparatively speaking, in its infancy, and halfpenny periodicals, in which "Fair Rosamond" can at the same time read the "thrilling story" of "The Maid of Mystery, or

the Midnight Marriage," and intimate her wish to open "a matrimonial correspondence with A Son of the Ocean," were unknown. A time when the tales published in the few penny periodicals then before the public were as infinitely superior in plot, language, and moral tone, to the coarse, pernicious, spasmodic trash which at present occupies a considerable space in the majority of the cheap weekly periodicals, and vitiates the minds and morals of thousands who read it, as is Monte Christo in ingenuity of construction, variety of incident, and intensity of dramatic effect to the *majority* of the multitude of "sensation" novels which have been published during the last few years.

One good result of our reading was that, as it in a great measure withdrew us from our play, it made us desirous of showing that we could shine in other respects, and so, on the approach of the half-yearly examinations, we went in determinedly for prizes, and generally carried off a lot of the best among us. In this respect I had been very

successful during all my time at the school, and my good fortune continued to attend me in the first-class; and in my last half-year at school, the contest for the head prize—a large and handsome Reference Bible, given by the mayor of the borough—was reduced to a match between me and another boy, named Harry Wilson.

The examinations, by which the awards of the prizes were decided, took place a fortnight before the public one, the latter being merely a show performance, gone through in the presence, and for the benefit, of the admiring parents and friends of the pupils. The results of the private examinations were not supposed to be known to the pupils until the fortunate prize-takers were called up at the public examination to receive their rewards, but the name of the boy to whom the first prize was assigned was generally known to a select few before; and about a week previous to the show examination, I received reliable information that the first prize had fallen to my lot. Up to this point I had said nothing to my

parents respecting my prospects, but I now told them of my success, of which they were exceedingly proud, and my father at once expressed his intention of losing an afternoon's work to come and witness my triumph, as did also Billy Butcher when I told him of my good fortune.

Examination-day, at the Dockington Borough School, was a day of considerable bustle and excitement in the neighbourhood in which the school was situated. The three divisions of the school—boys, girls, and infants—numbered something like eighteen hundred scholars, and the parents of these children, and all others taking an interest in them or the school, were freely invited to attend, and see the pupils, so to speak, put through their educational facings. There were generally from six to eight hundred spectators present, the bulk of them being women. Mothers and other near relations of the pupils came with a natural desire of seeing their children take part in the proceedings of the day, but as the schools were gaily decorated and the

scholars sang and recited, a good number of mere sight-seers were also attracted, and when all was in readiness, the girls' school-room, in which the examinations were held, presented a very animated appearance.

The prizes were displayed in front of the platform, on which were assembled the committee of the school, and other gentlemen taking an interest in the welfare of the neighbourhood. In the rows of writing desks running down the centre of the room, were the scholars, dressed in their best clothes, and looking happy and excited; each row consisting of an equal number of boys and girls, while the spectators were arranged on either side of the room. The schools were thrown open to the public at one o'clock, visitors passing through the boys' school, in which specimens of writing and needle-work were laid out, into the infants' school, where, at two o'clock, the little scholars, many of whom were only two years of age, and the eldest only seven, sang one or two little songs, received their prizes, and were

dismissed previous to the examination of the other departments of the school, which commenced at three o'clock.

On the occasion of my last examination—which was one preceding the Christmas holidays—there was a large number of spectators, among whom, in addition to my parents and Billy Butcher, I recognised old Tom the tinman, whose "spoiled" nose, aggravator curls, terribly high and stiff collar, and loud birdseye neckerchief attracted a considerable amount of attention. As we marched up the school-room to our places, we exchanged nods and smiles with our friends, and could hear the usual hum of conversation, and catch such expressions as "That's our George, don't he look nice;" "Isn't that a pretty little fellow, with the curly hair;" "That's my little son, him with the blue tie."

When we had taken our seats the examination commenced with a reading lesson. This was followed by a song, and songs were also introduced between the exercises in arithmetic, history,

and geography, the other subjects upon which we were examined. When the general questioning had been got through, those who had to recite went upon the platform and gave their pieces, which were, one and all, received with great applause. After the recitations came the distribution of the prizes—the event of the day. Before proceeding to deliver the prizes, the chairman of the occasion made a brief speech, pointing out how thankless and difficult was the office of awarding them, and speaking kindly of the disappointment which some of the unsuccessful competitors doubtless felt, though they were too manly to express it, or to entertain any mean feeling of envy against their more fortunate companions, and concluded by urging them to try harder next time, and assuring parents that to the best of their abilities the masters had honestly and impartially discharged their functions. The boys in the lower classes got their prizes first, and as each boy was called on the platform his classmates gave a cheer, which was instantly

taken up by the other boys and the audience generally, and when the extreme youth or small stature of the prize taker excited particular attention, there would be a cry of "Well done, young 'un," or "Bravo, little 'un." As the business of presentation progressed the excitement increased, and had risen almost to sensation pitch by the time it came to the turn of the first class to receive their rewards. The general body of the boys were yet in ignorance as to whether the first prize had been finally awarded to Wilson or me, and when, at last, while there were still two books before the chairman, Wilson's name was called out, there arose that shuffling of feet and relieved heaving of breath which is generally heard when some point on which an audience has been eagerly curious or excited has been cleared up, and this was followed by such loudly whispered exclamations as, "By jingo, Johnny Robinson's got it after all; I thought Wilson would have beat him." "It's Robinson; I told you how it would be all along." When giving

Wilson his book, the chairman informed the audience that he had only been beaten by two marks in an examination that had virtually extended over several weeks, and that for all practical purposes of education there could scarcely be said to be any difference between him and the boy who had taken the first prize, and on leaving the platform Harry was long and loudly cheered. When silence was restored the chairman took up the prize of the day, and, opening it at the fly-leaf, called out, "John Robinson." The instant the name had passed his lips the whole of the boys—as was the custom of the school—sprang to their feet and gave three cheers for the winner, the spectators following suit. With my face all aflame, and trembling and dizzy from excitement, I made my way to the platform amid continuous cheering and cries of "Bravo Robinson," and "Well done, Johnny," and having received my prize, accompanied by some kind and commendatory remarks from the chairman, I returned to my place so confused and overwhelmed

by my position as scarcely to be conscious of the tremendous cheering and waving of caps and handkerchiefs which greeted me; and totally unable to respond to the warm congratulations of my classmates, none of whom received me more heartily than did Harry Wilson.

With this blaze of triumph my school career practically came to an end. I went back to school for a few weeks after the holidays, but only to be out of mischief, and at the end of February I left it to return no more; and having signed my indentures in the following week, Johnny Robinson the Schoolboy ceased to be, and young Jack Robinson the Apprentice entered upon his "seven long years."

THE END.

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